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Welcome to the Principal Research Center's third issue of the peer-reviewed Journal of School Administration Research and Development (JSARD), an open access, online and print publication. The JSARD is indexed by Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), a free online library of education research sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education.

The purpose of the JSARD is to support the mission of the Principal Research Center Inc., which advocates for the highest quality 21st century education of children through the improvement of selection and development of school leaders in our nation's schools. By publishing high-quality research and commentaries on school leadership topics, we hope to connect educational stakeholders from universities, governing agencies, school districts, and other educational organizations interested in improving education for children in the United States. Our third issue includes articles from researchers and practitioners on topics including school leadership development, organizational change, gender bias, and grading.

The publication of this journal represents a collaboration between researchers and practitioners currently working in universities, education organizations, and school districts who are actively pursuing the improvement of leadership selection and development in education. We want to thank everyone who has supported our journal and we are looking forward to publishing our fourth issue.

Sincerely,

Brandon Palmer
Managing Editor

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The Journal of School Administration Research and Development

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Q & A Dialogue

with
Brendan Menuey, Executive Principal
and
Evangeline Petrich, Executive Principal

In his book *The Principal,* Michael Fullan stated, "Principals' responsibilities have increased enormously over the past two decades. They are expected to run a smooth school; manage health, safety, and the building: innovate without upsetting anyone; connect with students and teachers; be responsive to parents and the community; answer to their districts; and above all deliver results." At Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) in Virginia, Dr. Brendan Menuey and Evangeline Petrich both serve as executive principals; supporting, developing, and supervising principals whose responsibilities are as enormous as Fullan aptly describes.

Dr. Menuey became an executive principal for school improvement at FCPS in Virginia in 2015 after starting his fifth year as principal at Lake Anne Elementary School. He started his career in education teaching at Forestville Elementary School, then moved to Colvin Run Elementary School when it opened in 2003. Dr. Menuey served as assistant principal at Lake Anne and at Lutie Lewis Coates Elementary School and became principal at Lake Anne in 2011. He holds a bachelor's degree in foreign affairs, a master's degree in elementary education, and a doctorate in school administration and supervision, all from the University of Virginia.

Evangeline Petrich currently serves as Executive Principal of Region 3 of FCPS. She joined FCPS in 2012 as the director of Cluster 4. As Executive Principal, she supports 45 schools, providing assistance and mentoring to principals, monitoring school improvement plans, and working with the region leadership teams. She also works closely with the Region 3 assistant principals, guiding them through their professional development. Prior to working for FCPS, Petrich was an 18-year veteran of the Virginia Beach City Public Schools. She began her career teaching

mathematics in middle and high schools, then served as an assistant principal and instructional technology coordinator. In 2008, she became principal of Kempsville High School where she remained until joining FCPS. As principal, she led 175 faculty and staff members in the continuous improvement cycle through data analysis, common formative and summative assessments, and collaboration in professional learning teams. Kempsville High School achieved full accreditation during her tenure. Petrich earned her bachelor of science degree in mathematics from the College of William and Mary. She received her master of education degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of Virginia.

The following Q and A dialogue with Executive Principals Dr. Brendan Menuey and Evangeline Petrich describes their roles in building capacity in school principals within the Fairfax County Public School system in Virginia.

Q1: How important is the principal to a school's success?

EP: A principal influences his or her staff and the teaching and learning that takes place in the school. Effective school leadership matters. In our Project Momentum Intensive schools (schools in our district that did not meet a state accreditation benchmark) that have a new principal, one of the things we notice immediately is the positive change in organizational culture. These principals build relationships with students, staff, and parents immediately so that a focus on high quality instruction, teamwork, and collaboration exists.

BM: When I was a principal, and I would receive compliments about my leadership skills, I really believed it was the entire staff that made the school what it is and that my leadership was only a very small part

of the success. Once I moved to the central office and began to supervise principals, I can absolutely recognize what I was being told all along--that the principal is the person most responsible for school climate and for student achievement. I have seen historically struggling schools dramatically improve when a new principal is hired. I can sense the improvements as soon as I approach the school, enter the office, and see what the school puts on display.

Q2: What are some key traits you look for in a prospective principal and how do you evaluate those traits during selection?

EP: In our work with schools that are at risk of not meeting state accreditation, we look for a leader who has had leadership experiences in turnaround schools. We look for someone who has a solid understanding of instructional pedagogy, who can build and communicate a shared vision of high expectations for all stakeholders, who can develop strong collaborative learning teams, and who knows how to analyze and use data. When we advertise for a principal vacancy in our district, we gather input from parents, staff, and students regarding the desired traits in the next principal and the needs of the school. Questions are developed around these desired traits and staff and community members listen to candidates' responses during a panel interview. Additional rounds of interviews are held with finalists that allow for more in-depth inquiry of the candidate's ability to successfully lead a building.

BM: We refer to the applicant's "body of work," almost like we would for an artist. I want to see a history of strong student achievement and positive change over time on some of our many measures (working conditions survey, discipline incidents recorded, etc.). I am particularly interested in observing and learning more about an applicant's people skills, confidence, presentation, and professionalism. I need to be able to see the person as the principal before he or she gets the job.

Q3: If a principal lacked a certain trait that you believed was critical to their success how would you go about fostering that trait in them?

EP: Our role as executive principals allows us to work closely with principals in our region. When working with a principal, I often ask the questions, "How will you know that it is being done?" and "What feedback does the teacher receive?" For example, I have been working with a principal who wants his fourth-grade team to use "number talks" in instruction. However, we identified that he (the principal) would also benefit

from the job-embedded professional development that his teachers are receiving. Not only would they all share common language, but they would also be able to identify what number talks look like when it is successfully implemented in the classroom.

BM: The part I like best about my job is the coaching of principals, particularly novice principals. In working with them, sometimes it is evident that they can improve certain skills such as managing their PTAs, communicating with their staff, providing feedback to teachers, or handling school finances. Once the principal and I identify this area for growth together, we can create a plan to move forward. This often involves my observing and providing feedback to them in these areas, or calling in additional resources to help us both learn more. It is essential that the principal desire to improve so that lasting change can be achieved.

Q4: Explain how you support principals directly and indirectly in the day to day and the long term in your role as a principal supervisor.

EP: As a principal supervisor, I work directly with 15 of the 45 schools in my region. I am responsible for the performance evaluation of these 15 principals. Our principals develop a personal goal and each school develops a "School Innovation and Improvement Plan." I monitor, collaborate, and provide feedback throughout the year. Day to day, a principal may reach out to me for consultation or I may be in a building observing a collaborative team with the principal.

BM: Most of my time in any week is spent in schools, working with leaders there. We typically work on goals set at the beginning of the year, aiming to improve their skills and knowledge in particular areas. All of our school visits involve classroom observations with debriefing afterwards. In this manner, we can norm ourselves with the school leaders about effective instruction and provide growth-producing feedback to staff members. Overall, I believe this is one of the most important tasks we can accomplish with our principals, which will result in better teaching and learning for all.

Q5: What measures do you use to evaluate schools and/or principals you supervise?

EP: Our district uses an evaluation process that aligns with the state's Principal Performance Standards & Criteria. Student academic growth is a component of the process as well as the areas of instructional leadership, school climate, human resources management,

organizational management, communication and community relations, and professionalism.

BM: We meet with all principals at the beginning of each school year to discuss their goals with them, and to set SMARTR goals for the year (strategic and specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, time bound, and rigorous). We check in with principals about these goals midyear and at the end of the year, reflecting on data at those times. Those on summative evaluation also complete a self-assessment, which we discuss during a conference at the start of the school year. In addition, we administer a staff opinion survey and a parent opinion survey at the schools where the principal is on summative evaluation, then review these findings with the principals in the spring. Overall, it is a fairly comprehensive way to evaluate principals and yields some excellent information to help them better lead their schools.

Q6: Describe some of the successes you have seen in the schools where you provide development and support to principals you supervise.

EP: In a district with 200 schools and centers, 40 are identified as either intensive or targeted because they are at greatest risk of State Accreditation Warning status or have been identified as Title I Focus Schools. Instructional support is provided to these schools in the form of an instructional coach for each area of warning in math and/or English; access to instructional rounds; direct support from a team of assigned resource teachers to a school; and a monthly interdisciplinary meeting of both school and central office staff. It is amazing to see a principal's leadership growth and consequently, his or her school's growth after receiving these supports. A measure of success is when a school that started as an intensive school steps down to targeted status (with fewer instructional supports) and then eventually steps down to universal status. This universal status means that a school can sustain high quality teaching and learning on its own!

BM: Many of our schools needed a little bit of a "push" to gather enough momentum to overcome obstacles and improve their schools. This is where the name of our school improvement model came from -- "Project Momentum." Once we focus the assistance and provide the right kind of differentiated support, the schools make progress. With regular visits from central office staff, monthly data dialogues, extended contracts and extra funding to help with professional development, the principals at our most at-risk schools are able to transform their entire school community to become one that meets and eventually ex-

ceeds expectations.

Conclusion

Dr. Brendan Menuey and Evangeline Petrich provided insight into principal support, development and evaluation in their role as executive principals at FCPS. They also provided insight into principal selection— Specifically, the traits they look for and how they assess those traits during selection. Experience with turnaround schools and the ability to raise student achievement were high among the traits sought after in school-site principals. Improving schools through a comprehensive model called *Project Momentum* is also a key element of their role as executive principals. *Project Momentum* provides targeted schools with focused assistance and differentiated support to improve leadership, teaching, and learning. At FCPS it is clear that student achievement is a critical priority and building capacity in school leaders is paramount in providing its students with high-quality leadership and education.

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If you are interested in participating in a future Q and A Dialogue article featured in the *Journal of School Administration Research and Development,* please email editor@JSARD.org and include a brief letter of interest with the following information: name, title, organization, and area of expertise.

Managing the Ebb and Flow: A Case for Calling Forth Student Voice

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ABSTRACT: This case study explored how a principal in a suburban elementary school in the northeastern United States empowered students and used student voice to develop his own leadership. The researchers collected and analyzed data in the form of observations, principal interviews, and student focus groups. Results and discussion describe and explain how the principal engaged with students' perspectives to structure his experiences of school and learning. Also, results indicate that the principal's self-awareness of his instructional leadership actions, particularly regarding the inclusion of student voice and agency, is critical for effective and meaningful leadership. This case provides a new direction for developing and practicing school leaders to consider self-evaluation and reflection as part of ongoing leadership improvement, framed by the research-based concepts of instructional leadership, student voice, and perceptual congruence. Finally, the case study provides an opportunity for the field of educational research to open meaningful and often-overlooked discussions emphasizing the value of including students in models of shared instructional leadership and empowering youth as learners and leaders in their own right.

Keywords: student voice, perceptual congruence, shared leadership, educational leadership

When principals build their educational contexts around the premise of listening to students, new theories that transcend traditional frameworks can emerge to transform the work being done in schools (Cook-Sather, 2010; Elden & Levin, 1991). Further, principals that only use adult perspectives to shape their leadership practices leave students to circumvent or adapt to goals that in many cases will not square with their own and may impede students' ability to develop socially and academically. While principals have long been regarded as the school manager, they are also in a unique position to empower the voice of a large population of students.

Principals' Perceptual Congruence and Instructional Leadership

Principals' administrative or daily management concerns, balanced with broader, instructionally relevant leadership practices, are enduring challenges of the principal position (Barnes, Camburn, Sanders, & Sebastian, 2010). However, building a positive instructional climate and culture is a struggle for principals who believe their time is often dominated by managerial tasks and paperwork (Barnes et al., 2010; Goldring, Huff, May, & Camburn, 2008). As accountability demands increase and pressures mount on schools to produce academic achievement growth, school communities will continue to seek leaders with particular sets of skills to meet established learning goals and expectations (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011). Teachers and students appreciate a visible principal with an open and inviting demeanor who also maintains strong and consistent expectations (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Growing a positive teaching and learning environment requires personal daily attention to the priorities that the community has entrusted the principal to cultivate in the school despite all the barriers, interruptions, stresses, and expectations that come with the position of instructional leader.

Rooted in professional self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), principals' ability to evaluate and reflect upon their own performance is a critical component to leadership performance (Bingham, Haubrich, & White, 1993; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). *Perceptual congruence*, or the difference between an individual's self-

perception of performance and the opinions of community stakeholders, has been found to correlate with leadership effectiveness (Atwater, Ostroff, Yammarino, & Fleenor, 2008). While principals are most often evaluated by district leadership, this is now increasingly occurring by community stakeholders (Fuller, Richards, & Cohen 2008; Goldring, Mavrogordato, & Haynes, 2014). If stakeholders are included in a more comprehensive evaluation model, principal effectiveness is measured by teachers' ratings and parents' perceptions of a leader's performance (Fuller et al., 2008; Goff, Goldring, & Bickman, 2014; Goldring et al., 2014). However, student voices are not often included in instruments to evaluate aspects of principal effectiveness or school culture (Fuller et al., 2008), which demonstrates the dissonance between students' perceptions of principal practice and the principal's self-assessment and awareness of his daily activities as a manager and school leader.

Student Voice

The eagerness of students to take on an academic identity and commit to taking an interest in their learning, behavior, and school experiences rests largely on how principals choose to empower students. Students who are able to take charge of their own education and play a more active role in their learning will develop at a faster rate academically, socially, and emotionally (Kirchner, 2005). Principals who take the time to develop student agency and responsibility within their schools reap the rewards of a student body with a strong sense of self who play a dynamic role in their own education (Mitra, 2004; Simmons, Graham, & Thomas, 2014).

When adults listen to what students have to say about their learning and meaningfully use student voice and participation to shape their experienes of school, they can empower students as learners and transcend traditional school frameworks in the process (Cook-Sather, 2010, 2014). As students gain confidence and experience, they naturally create opinions, ideas, and beliefs about school. These include individual perspectives and actions within the contexts of learning and their experiences with education (Rogers & Lea, 2005). However, opportunities for students to express their opinions and make decisions about a range of school-wide factors that affect their learning have been few and far between (Beattie, 2012).

Principals that have found non-traditional ways of approaching their role as school leader minimize time spent on non-instructional tasks (Baroutsis, Mcgregor, & Mills, 2015; Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Damiani,

2014). One way principals are breaking the mold is by making decisions in a collaborative manner with students. This non-traditional and decentralized approach occurs when principals actively involve students in making decisions that may impact students' experiences in school. While students at these sites are sometimes allowed to make decisions around managing and organizing school activities and behavior, shared decision making has been largely subjected to limiting school parameters (Warner, 2010). Unfortunately these parameters have rarely been designed to include students' perspectives of teaching, learning, and leadership (Gentilucci, 2004; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

Giroux (1992) argues that educators must become more engaged and reform minded in their approach to working with students. At the root of his argument, and other arguments rooted in issues of social justice, is a need for school leaders to address social pressures that challenge the principal's ability to reach learners that have until now been failed by the system (Grundy, 1993). Student identity and academic self-concept are another set of internal factors that compete with students' and principals' agendas (Silins & Mulford, 2010). Current educational reform thinking underestimates the importance of student agency — specifically the willingness of students to take on an academic identity and commit time and effort when peers are making other choices in school (Jackson, 2003). Many adults, and principals in particular, struggle to view students as collaborators who can potentially inform their practice.

To move toward understanding how educators can use student perspectives to structure their approaches to leadership, this study used two research questions:

> 1) From the student perspective, what are the most significant challenges faced by students in school?

> 2) How does the principal help children cope with the challenges they face?

Methods

This study used a case study design to describe how a principal in a suburban elementary school in the northeastern United States empowered students and used student voice to develop his own leadership. Case narrative was selected as a design to help the researchers investigate a contemporary leadership phenomenon––perceptual congruence of leadership practice––that has received little attention in the literature on educational leadership. This approach is particularly well suited to new research areas or research

areas for which existing theory does not sufficiently apply (Gomm, 2000; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2000; Yin, 1994). In early stages of research on a topic, or when a fresh perspective is needed, case narrative is a useful way to connect multiple data sources and to help offer insights into themes that are rarely connected (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The principal of Forest Hills (FH) Elementary arrived to the school 18 months before the study along with 170 newly enrolled students. He also replaced approximately a third of the staff after the previous principal retired. Before arriving at FH, the principal worked at a neighboring elementary school within the district for seven years as a teacher and seven more as a principal.

FH is a K-6 site serving 498 students who are predominantly white and middle class. Approximately 25% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. FH is located in an area of suburban sprawl just over 15 miles from the closest city center. On each side of the school and for miles in both directions, one can see restaurant chains, superstores, gas stations, retail outlets, and other places of business that can be found across the country. But despite this impersonal setting, one finds a much different atmosphere inside the school. FH has a warm, nurturing environment where teachers collaborate, students take responsibility for their own learning, and the principal proactively works to understand the needs of students and staff.

The participating principal was recruited through the following methods: a) recommendations from colleagues at local universities and regional schools that identified principals that work directly with students to find meaningful ways of promoting student learning and shaping their leadership, b) face-to-face screening interviews that revealed how each principal incorporated student voice and/or empowered students, and c) expressed interest from principals excited about the study.

The lead researcher conducted two interviews with the principal. An initial formal interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was conducted before the researcher met with the students. Questions asked the principal to describe a typical day, success stories, challenges and hurdles, methods in which student-based initiatives were presented at the schools, and his interactions with the students. A second interview, which lasted 60 minutes, was then conducted with the principal. The questioning in this interview was created in response to the analysis of the first focus group with students, was informed by observa-

tions at the site, and was intended to give the principal an opportunity to respond to any questions or concerns posed by the students.

Two focus groups were each composed of four to six students randomly selected from grades 3, 4, and 5 as determined by the principal. Chosen students were also among those whose parents were willing to complete and submit consent forms. Both focus groups were meant to be representative of the overall school population.

This study used the recommendations of Liamputtong (2011) when conducting student focus groups interviews. Focus groups began with a warm-up activity with students from all groups, which involved helping the group to become comfortable and acquainted with one another. Students were asked to identify images of various adults and to describe the same images during a free association activity. Next, students were provided with colored pencils and lined paper to draw what they thought their principal does during the school day.

The first focus group was provided with opportunities to describe their experiences, relationships with adults, challenges in school, support from principals, and voice given in shaping school culture. The second focus group began with a read-aloud of an age-appropriate children's book about principals as a prompt for a more focused discussion (Creech & Bliss, 2001). After the story, students were prompted to discuss the story as it related to data collected from the principal's second interview. Each focus group interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was conducted by the lead researcher, along with the presence of another adult from the school site. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis by the researchers.

The lead researcher conducted four days of principal observations at FH. During each session, lasting between one and two hours, the researcher took detailed field notes describing the principal's actions.

An analytically inductive method allowed essential category emergence as data were collected, produced, and analyzed. Data analysis was guided by Elden & Levin's (1991) model of co-generative dialogue and models of narrative inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008; Rolling, 2008). This model suggests that more participatory approaches taken by the researcher and subjects during the data collection process can help the participants––in our case a principal and students––develop a shared framework that can be tested through collective action or used to produce a new general theory that can inform and improve

their situation in the future.

In the first stage of analysis, two sets of codes were categorized––one for the principal and one for students. The resulting two sets were then merged and assigned to field notes, interview transcripts, and any artifacts collected from the students during the focus groups. More general categories for coding the interview data were based on what students and the principal said, what they did, how they interacted, and how the principal helped students learn.

Results and Discussion

Data analysis produced three emergent categories to address the research questions: *leadership agenda*, *instructional leadership*, and *principal of the day*. Below, results for each category are presented along with an integrated discussion.

Leadership Agenda

In our first conversation with the FH principal, we asked him to describe his role as principal. He relayed the following statement:

> It's really supporting the initiatives that are coming down from the district, from the state, the federal government, and have them be able to efficiently, smoothly, flawlessly go into the classroom with the teacher. It's trying to figure that out.

The principal appears to be doing a good job of actively coordinating the curriculum. Standardized test scores, coupled with observations of the work taking place in FH classrooms, show how students and staff members are successfully implementing the instructional program and helping students learn and grow academically, socially, and emotionally.

The school has had numerous recent physical changes. As a result, the hallways are brighter, and the walls are adorned with glossy new posters of school-wide philosophies where tattered student illustrations previously hung. These glossy and colorful signs feature characteristics of FH learners, anti-bullying rules, whole body listening cues, and the school's golden rule: *Good Choices Equal Great Results.* Student work that hangs throughout the hallways is focused on content and is more desirable to the eye than in the past. *Paw Points*, the new character education incentive system, hangs proudly outside of the principal's office, marking moments when any staff member recognizes student achievement.

Additionally, the school has a new media coordinator, and morning announcements are broadcast from their new media and technology center onto Smart-board screens in every classroom. Based on observation, the students are actively engaged in learning and are given opportunities to develop socially and emotionally in this very nurturing climate.

However, despite the evidence and appearance of a high-achieving, healthy school culture, there was a disconnect between the principal's leadership and the school community members. In particular, there appeared to be conflict arising from the principal's need for control and the students' school experiences relating to this control. During our first meeting with the principal, he was asked how students' opinions and attitudes about school or teaching influenced his agenda. He responded,

> Everybody needs to be led. Everybody needs to be able to look to somebody for guidance. But we also have to have expectations. As we work with kids, and as we work with adults, the expectation of where we're going needs to be out there. Because if the kids understand, the adults understand. If the adults understand they can help lead students. So as kids work through it, you want to listen to the children, but you need to lead the children. You can't let them control what we do.

This passage represents two sides of the principal's approach to leadership. There is the side that acknowledges the value of student voice for influencing the work of adults and the side that ignores opportunities to do much more than listen in his role as school leader. Unlike the principal's experiences at his previous site, a school where behavioral and academic issues were more of a concern, FH's kids are rarely insubordinate. Furthermore, the majority of FH students are testing at grade level, as standardized testing shows that students are making adequate yearly progress in English language arts, mathematics, and science. These facts, coupled with observations of the quality work occurring in FH classrooms, shows students and staff are adequately navigating the instructional program. Outside the building at recess, throughout the hallways, in the lunchroom, and even inside the main office, things here seem to be running smoothly. This leaves the principal to focus on more traditional managerial functions from the main office, where he does an excellent job coordinating his ample supply of support personnel and resources around a range of student and staff concerns.

Instructional Leadership

After having a few opportunities to sit down and speak with the principal about his practice, it became increasingly clear that he had a great deal of freedom

over how he chooses to spend his time at school. He begins his day by coming in before the rest of the staff to respond to e-mails, voicemail, and any concerns that take place in the overnight hours. Like most principals, he is present early in the morning and ensures he is visible to both students and parents when school begins, during lunch, and at the end of the day during dismissal. The principal also conducts a casual walk-through of the building once the kids and teachers become settled in their classrooms.

His approaches to school leadership take place in between the buses and bells. While the principal stated that he supported students academically, socially, and emotionally at his previous site, he emphasized how he worked with students at FH by stating, "It's way beyond the little things of taking care of the kids; it's taking care of the community." At suburban sites like FH, many parents contact their school principal when their children are having problems with a classmate, teacher, or subject area. As a result, one of the principal's primary functions, in addition to managing the ebb and flow that occurs throughout the day, is to respond to these concerns and support other adults in cultivating a community that the principal repeatedly said is "moving forward together." When asked to describe how this looks on a daily basis, the principal relayed the following statement:

> It's a variety of things that can take place, and that's usually by lunchtime. I very seldom have lunch, I eat throughout the whole day, and I don't have a designated lunch. The afternoon continues on like that. I might get a phone call right now and I'll have an issue here. It might be a bus issue. Or a situation where the parents are upset because something happened within the building and they didn't go through the proper chain of command. Doesn't happen often. But it does happen. It's just a variety of things like that. Usually I'm preparing things to help move the building forward. I always try to model how to move a building forward as I work with the staff. But it's a variety of things. It ebbs and flows. I always try to meet and greet parents when they come in. It's very important that I'm visible here, that they feel welcome here throughout the day. I'll touch base with my psychologist [or] my counselor about anything I need to know about kids. I'll meet with the nurse. I'll walk through her office and ask how things are going. Once in a while, [staff will] stop me and ask to talk.

While the principal strives to be visible to his stake-holders and provide adults with opportunities to touch base and discuss a whole range of conditions that may affect students and their learning, he neglected to mention that he was doing much instructional leadership. He did not identify or describe professional development, instruction, assessment, or classroom talk in any way. One might assume that principals at high-achieving schools like this one are spending hours a day supervising instruction and monitoring student learning and progress.

One instance occurred where the principal stopped into a classroom to observe teaching and learning. The focus of the walk-through was not instruction or learning, but behavioral expectations of students and teachers. Upon entering the classroom, he greeted the teacher and asked what the class was working on. The characteristics of an FH learner were displayed on the Smartboard, and almost as if on cue, the teacher lifted a rain stick as a signal to the students that they should demonstrate their knowledge of whole body listening. The teacher and the students knew the routine verbatim, as if they had been recently or repeatedly drilled in this exercise. As we left the classroom some time later the principal remarked, "And that wasn't even staged." Staged or not, he has created a climate and culture in his school where all members of the school community are aware of his expectations. Order and organization appear to be very important to the principal as a leader. He also emphasized these priorities while he described and displayed his daily leadership activities plan.

During another visit to FH, I asked the principal to share how he prioritized the variety of tasks he was responsible for each day. He stated,

> I do start my day with a list. Usually there's about five items on the list. For example today my list consists of my set meeting [with teachers] at eight. I always do encouraging words every month, on the first of the month to my staff [to] show them I care and I help to support them. I have a meeting at ten with you, and then I want to make sure that I connect with my teachers [and tell them] that you were coming and you would meet with them today. Then after school I have a commitment. That's my checklist. Sometimes it's the whole page, sometimes only a few items like today. Which I like because it gives me a lot of freedom and flexibility to work with kids if necessary.

This was an opportunity to explore how the principal views shared leadership with students, especially, so I

asked him to explain what he meant when he said, "to work with kids if necessary." He took this opportunity to share a story from his previous principalship:

> If a student was really struggling with doing their work, there were many times where I ended up having lunch with those kids, and we did study halls, academic support for those kids where I was very involved and helped supervise that work with kids. I don't do it as much here because the teachers have a handle on it. But I used to be very involved in my old school.

I also wanted to explore how the principal works to provide students with opportunities to talk about their experiences of teaching and learning, which led to the following exchange:

> Principal: We also do have a student council, which is school wide. They meet monthly to do a lot of different things. Most of it is our school spirit days, our charitable events, so we do those kinds of things.
>
> Author 1: Do they ever get together to talk about anything regarding learning, leadership, or teaching?
>
> Principal: The student senate is more teaching about community, how it's an important thing, and how to give back to others. They don't get involve—[cuts himself off]––like many times I used to have a student council at my old school and the cafeteria always came up.

In these statements the principal illustrated the differences in his orientations towards students, student voice, and level of principal-student engagement based on his experiences at two school sites. At his previous school, he perceived that the students and teachers needed him more as an instructional and academic support leader. He was more actively involved in their daily school lives. At FH, he did not perceive these leadership actions as necessary and has the tendency to manage structures, time, and expectations for the school community. In an era of school accountability, this case displays how a principal can be lulled by data-driven success and lose sight of crucial parts of instructional leadership practices. Student engagement and relationships are integral to the health of all school communities.

Principal of the Day

The school district website showed pictures of the principal beside a young female student beneath a caption that read "Principal of the Day." Ideas like this, which he incorporated at his previous school just months before arriving at FH, were certainly designed to empower students as learners and leaders in their own right. However, it is interesting to note that in being bestowed the honor of principal of the day, not one of the nineteen photos documenting this occasion pictured the honoree in the classroom working with students. The student was shown leaning back in a leather chair with her feet kicked up on the principal's desk while she pretended to talk on a cordless phone. Another image showed the principal pretending to pour a student's coffee while she read the newspaper. Still another showed her in the office disciplining or reinforcing a golden rule to a stuffed animal. She was also shown accompanying the principal on walk-throughs, holding a walkie-talkie, and riding in an elevator. In only one of the pictures she is posing (facing the camera) beside some students who wear headphones and work facing computers. These photos and this well-intentioned initiative sends a message to students and staff that the principalship is a position of authority that comes with certain requisite managerial decision making and privileges. These images broadcasted to the entire school and community what the principal valued about his work, and they are similar to the illustrations and descriptions students offered within the focus group discussions. Furthermore, they aligned with the students' conversations and the principal's responses during one-on-one interviews.

While roughly a third of the students interviewed at FH reported that the principal provided students with opportunities to eat lunch with him as one of the choices for the school's character education incentive plan, they described how interactions with the principal occurred more often when students were misbehaving and teachers needed help with discipline. During my first focus group meeting with students, I asked them to tell me what their principal does. We had the following exchange:

> Author One: What does your principal do?
> Student One: He always comes around to the classrooms and checks on us.
> Student Two: He writes reports about bus issues.
> Student Three: I know he likes it when kids are quiet and nice to each other.
> Author One: How do you know that he's the principal?
> Student Four: Because he has an office.
> Student Five: Because he's dressed up nice.
> Student Six: Because he sits in the office.

Student Two: He also helps us learn about no-bullying and goes around and helps people to see if they're being good to other people, or to see how people are being mean to each other.

While the students' responses varied, they aligned with both school observations and the principal's comments. During a second focus group interview I had the following exchange:

Author One: If you have a problem with school, who do you talk to?
Student One: My mom.
Student Two: My mom and my principal.
Author One: You talked to your principal?
Student Two: No I didn't.
Student One: I didn't either but I think you should.

When I asked the students at FH to explain some ways they would deal with problems they were having with school, response types were grouped into two categories. The first included students who said they would talk with a sibling (at FH or another site in the district), a parent, a classmate, or their teacher about the issue. The second group said they would work to get the principal's attention, which was not surprising considering the context of many of my questions. What was surprising was the way this group of students would go about being heard. Below is one example of focus group dialogue that occurred around this topic:

Student One: You should act bad so that you can get the principal's attention.
Student Two: I would start meeting with kids and have a strike, or campaign, or write a letter.
Student Three: I don't really talk about my feelings but I express them with yelling and screaming.
Student Four: I'd go on strike or protest.
Student Three: Seriously though, I'd have my little brother go tell the principal for me. He's a crazy kid.

This exchange demonstrates how one group of students at FH said they would react to problems they were having with teachers, peers, classwork, or home. It also serves as an example of how student voice can manifest itself when principals do not develop ways to honor student voice or give students opportunities to actively share their thoughts and feelings about school. These examples of oppositional or resistant approaches to interacting with adults are nothing new and are not unique to this site. Still, these examples highlight a reluctance of students to go to their princi-

pal for help. This may stem, at least in part, from the limited nature of the interactions students have had with the principal in the eighteen months since he has arrived. It can also be traced back to a more traditional model of leadership, as the principal's direct interactions with students are primarily focused on issues of discipline, and feedback and observation are typically focused on teacher performance. However, the students at FH are happy to be in school and are doing well academically. Students challenges at FH were often with specific subjects or teachers.

When asked how students dealt with the challenges they faced in class, they reported that they were likely to go to a parent, peer, or sibling before speaking with an adult in school. One example of this reality manifested itself during a lively student-driven focus group. During the focus group, students said they were having a difficult time with their physical education teacher. When I asked the students if they were able to describe the problems they were having with the teacher, they said they were scared of the teacher and did not want to get in further trouble. This exchange between students highlights just one situation in which the school would benefit from increased student voice. Further, it shows that when students are given an opportunity to discuss their experiences related to teaching, learning, and leadership with an adult who listens, they become empowered. As a result of these discussions, there were signs during our final interview that the students began to consider their principal as someone they might be able to approach about problems they were having during or outside of school.

Overall, the principal's approach to leadership represents what may appear to many readers as a typical form of primary school leadership in the United States. However, there is a dissonance between the apparent success of the school and the principal's lack of engagement with students. The school culture emphasized organization and behavioral control, highlighted by students' school experiences as they relate to this control. Unfortunately, like many principals, the principal of FH only gave students opportunities to make school decisions related to maintaining the status quo. The principal's leadership style created a cycle of detachment relative to his work with the children in his care.

Implications for Researchers and Practitioners

When principals build their educational contexts around the premise of listening to students, new theories that transcend traditional frameworks can emerge to transform the work being done in schools (Cook-

Sather, 2010; Elden & Levin, 1991). Further, principals that only use adult perspectives to shape their leadership practices leave students to circumvent or adapt to goals that in many cases will not square with their own and may impede their ability to develop socially and academically. While principals have long been regarded as school managers, they are also in a unique position to show a larger population of students that they can or cannot have a voice based on the work that they do.

Principals' perceptions of leadership practice have been examined as they coincide with teachers' perceptions of leadership effectiveness (Blase & Blase, 1999; Goff et al., 2014). These studies most commonly contrast principals' self-ratings with those provided by other adults in the school. The data from these studies is a useful starting place for school leaders that are hoping to align their objectives with those of the teaching staff. Perhaps more importantly, they also point to a need to include students' perspectives and ratings relative to their experiences of learning and leadership.

The most revealing part of this case study came from conversations with students while uninterrupted by adults. During the second focus group interview, conversations about leadership and the challenges students were facing in school allowed students to open up and comfortably share their opinions about their principal, teachers, and school. It was in these spirited moments of conversation that the researchers saw the students and the students saw themselves as capable of providing an honest and sometimes critical account of the work being done by their school leaders. It was in these moments that students reflected on challenges that impeded their learning. Bullying, exclusion, and unhealthy competition were just a few of the problems students cited—problems that continue to plague many schools to varying degrees. Students also commented that they were still being confronted with problems outside of school and that these problems "get them off-track" and in the way of their opportunities for growth.

After spending a significant amount of time reflecting on these challenges—how they relate to decisions principals make (or do not make) and how talking about these challenges made the students feel empowered—we have realized the real significance of this work. While our work as outside researchers gave students and the principal the opportunities to reflect and develop their thinking, the best way to conduct student perspective research may be as a school insider. K-12 practitioners that can actively elicit student voice and use it to shape the way they structure their

students' unique experiences of learning are in an excellent position to impact change within their classrooms, schools, and districts. If principals can structure regular interactions with their students and focus conversation on the students' experiences of school and learning, they will be better able to respond to student issues before they manifest as oppositional behavior, student failure, or office referrals.

Conclusions

Despite, or perhaps because of the high level of student achievement at FH, students have had few meaningful opportunities to interact with their principal. The principal is a strong leader of adults and spends his time helping them with the challenges they face at his new site, and as a result, students perceive him as someone who is there to spread a clear and consistent message, help the school run smoothly, and occasionally act as a disciplinarian. While the principal acknowledges the role students play in making the school function, he is not inclined to take their lead or use their voice to support their experiences of school or learning.

The evidence provided in this case narrative demonstrates how the principal should be more informed and engaged in reflective practices that include his stakeholders. Models of reflective practice and evaluation that include stakeholder voices, specifically students, provide school leaders with a more holistic and inclusive framework to support decision making and respond to school community needs.

The aforementioned privileges come to the principal in the form of choices, where he is able to decide what he is going to focus on during any given day. It is these choices that are made in between the buses and the bells that shape what this principal stands for. As principal of FH, he makes decisions with the students' best interests in mind. He still checks in on students and gives them opportunities to engage on a personal level. The students respond to their principal, who is very approachable, and feel comfortable asking him general questions about school during his walk-throughs. While these behaviors reflect what were once non-traditional approaches to building leadership, the principal chooses to exercise the privilege of leading FH by focusing primarily on developing the work of adults around initiatives that are passed down from above and moving the entire school community forward together by spreading a clear and consistent message.

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African American Women Superintendents in Texas: An Exploration of Challenges and Supports

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ABSTRACT: School superintendents who are African American women are understudied. In this study, researchers explored the lived experiences of African American women superintendents in the state of Texas. The purpose of the study was to identify the challenges, supports, and personal background characteristics that participants believed influenced their ascension to superintendent positions. A phenomenological research approach was used, and data were collected through individual interviews with superintendent participants. Data were analyzed and interpreted using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction approach. Three major themes emerged in the results: (a) desire to impact others at various levels, (b) sources of personal strength, and (c) external support systems. Subthemes were identified and described for each larger theme. Findings suggest a need to expose aspiring African American women administrators to the challenges and rewards of superintendent positions and increase mentorship opportunities and quality preparation programs.

Keywords: superintendency, leadership, Black superintendents, women superintendents

When most students in the state of Texas arrive to their classrooms daily, they are met with the waiting face of their teacher. Regardless of whether they are entering a room serving 30 or more students in a crowded school building in the heart of Dallas or a classroom serving all grade levels in the small town of Gilmer, the face students most often see is that of a woman. Although this has been the case for the past century throughout America, there was a time when this would not have been the norm. Prior to the late eighteenth century, education was a male dominated field (Alston, 2000; Gammill & Vaughn, 2011; Sampson & Davenport, 2010). Both in learning and teaching, men––namely White men––were charged with the task of educating students (namely White male students) and preparing them for their future. This trend started changing throughout the nineteenth century, when women began to dominate the field of education. Despite their increasing presence in classrooms, men continued to dominate leadership positions, much as they do today. Unlike their White counterparts, African American women did not become a presence in the field of education until the late nineteenth century (Alston, 2000). The entrance of African American women into education was eventually viewed as a sign of upward social mobility (Irvine, 1988).

By 1950, half of the African American professionals in the United States were teachers. However the critical legal case *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka* significantly impacted the presence of African Americans in the field of education (Alston, 2005; Horsford & McKenzie, 2008; Moody, 1973; Taylor & Tillman, 2009). After this landmark case, which required American schools to desegregate, the number of Black educators began to decline (Irvine, 1988). Many Black teachers and administrators lost their jobs due to the closing of segregated Black schools. Teachers, principals, and even superintendents, who were looked upon as role models, advocates, and spokespersons for the Black community, were demoted or fired once their students were forced to integrate into the predominantly White schools (Alston, 2005; Horsford & McKenzie, 2008; Lyons & Chesley, 2004). As a result of the landmark case, a "whole generation of Black educators was lost" (Lyons & Chesley, 2004, p. 302). School desegregation decreased the availability of teaching jobs for many African American educators

who were then forced to compete with their White counterparts for teaching positions in the newly integrated schools (Horsford & McKenzie, 2008). As a result, many African Americans left the field of education, limiting Black students in their ability to find strong role models in their schools (Irvine, 1988).

The Rise of Women and African Americans in the Superintendency

The position of the superintendent did not emerge in American schools until the late nineteenth century. It was during this time that the structure of schools necessitated a leader that served in a plurality of roles. The superintendent was looked upon as the instructional leader of the school district, responsible for the development of curriculum and the retention of students. Additionally, the superintendent served as the district manager, overseeing budgets, scheduling repairs, and compiling reports for the school board (Urban & Wagoner, 2004). Today, over 80% of superintendents nation-wide are male. Despite the dominance of females in the classroom, few have broken the "glass ceiling" to reach this highest position in K-12 education (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001; Glass, 2000).

Dillard (2000) stated that the voices of African American women are often excluded from research literature and practice in the social sciences. There is an evident need to examine the experiences of these women to understand how they have been shaped by their racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The challenge of African American womens entering the superintendency is confounded by their double minority status as an African American and a women (Revere, 1987). For many African American women, the challenge of being African American and a woman has forced them into a life saturated with "conflict, confusion, estrangement, isolation, and a plethora of unmarked beginnings and endings, jump starts, and failures" (Fordham, 1993, p. 24). African American women are often required to transform their persona into one that does not appear "too Black" or "too female" (Fordham, 1993).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a broader understanding of the lived experiences of African American women superintendents in the state of Texas, particularly regarding the challenges, supports, and personal backgrounds that influenced their ascension to and acquisition of superintendent positions. Knowledge regarding these experiences can assist in helping superintendents in these districts understand the unique dynamics of this leadership experience. By understanding the stories of African American women superintendents in terms of their challenges, supports, and personal backgrounds, aspiring African American women in future generations may benefit and begin to make decisions regarding the achievability of a superintendent position. The governing body for education in Texas, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), identified 1,247 state school districts that were led by school superintendents, but only eight, or less than 1%, identified as an African American women (TEA, 2014). With such a small population, there is a need to examine the experiences these women have had as they serve in both rural and urban school districts. Jean-Marie, Williams, and Sherman (2009) encouraged examination of Black women administrators' experiences as a way to negate "hostility, indifference, and invisibility" (p. 565). Listening to the stories of these woman leaders, stories that have historically been "distorted and silenced" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36), might provide valuable insights to other aspiring women educators, particularly African American women educators. Through the accounts of other women educators, aspiring leaders might reflect upon their own individual journeys and benefit from the experiences of others as they seek leadership positions in public education.

Research Questions

One overarching research question and three sub-questions were used to guide this study: How do African American women superintendents describe their lived experiences in acquiring superintendent positions in the state of Texas?

- What challenges have African American women superintendents in Texas encountered in acquiring superintendent positions?

- What do African American women superintendents believe supported them in acquiring superintendent positions in the state of Texas?

- How have the personal backgrounds of select African American women superintendents contributed to their success in acquiring superintendent positions in Texas?

Theoretical Frameworks

Two theoretical constructs were utilized to guide this research: Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought. Critical Race Theory grew out of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Black Feminist Thought emerged to address the uniqueness of the feminist movement through the experiences of African American women.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT), a theory that emerged in the late 1970s as an outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement, asserts the acceptance of race and racism as permanent tenets in American society. CRT scholars developed the theory to address the subtle practices of racism that became prevalent after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). CRT moves the conversation from an ideological one to one that looks at race as an issue that impacts the daily lives of "raced" people (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Because of racial inequities in the U.S. education system, counter-stories are needed of individuals whose lives are embedded in a system of racism that is "endemic, pervasive, widespread, and ingrained in society and thus in education" (Milner, 2007, p. 390). An examination of race must be addressed to fully understand educational achievement differences that occur. The stories of people of color can be utilized to provide a more in-depth analysis of the educational system and serve as a catalyst to address "dysconscious racism" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58).

Black Feminist Thought

The second conceptual framework that guided this study was Black Feminist Thought. Using this framework, Black women are viewed as agents of knowledge regarding the interconnectedness of sexism, class oppression, and racism. Emphasis is placed on the experiences of African American women as opposed to those based on the experiences of White men and women. According to Collins (2000), the perspectives of Black women should be viewed as accounted for because they possess unique knowledge based on their experiences in a subordinate role in society. Naturally, these perspectives differ from those of individuals who hold dominant roles in society. Collins promoted the existence of two levels of knowledge in her discussion of Black Feminist Thought. The first level is common, taken-for-granted knowledge shared by members of the same group. The second level is the specialized knowledge that is offered by experts or those who are part of a group and express the group's perspective. Proponents of Black Feminist Thought express the first level of knowledge, but they also "provide us with a unique angle of vision concerning Black womanhood unavailable to other groups" (Collins, 2000, p. 35).

W. E. B. Du Bois, in his explanation of life for African Americans, coined the phrase *double consciousness*—the consciousness of being both African and American (Collins, 2000; Few, 2007; Jackson, 1999; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For African American women, there is an additional level to *double consciousness*—the consciousness of also being female. Through this simultaneous existence, African American women experience the world differently from those who are not Black or female (Collins, 2000; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Through understanding the importance of knowledge as an empowering force for oppressed people, scholars of Black Feminist Thought suggest that this knowledge can feed both political and economic change in institutions that ultimately will promote wider social change.

Methods

This study included data collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with six of the eight serving African American women superintendents in the state of Texas. Initial contact was made through email and phone calls to the district offices of each of the eight superintendents, and personal contact was made with seven of the eight. Of the seven, one superintendent declined to participate in the study. The eighth was unable to be reached despite numerous phone calls and emails.

In addition to the interview protocol designed to answer the research questions, demographic questions were asked of each participant to obtain general background information. Each interview was audiotaped and the researcher took notes during each interview. Initial analysis of significant statements was performed on each transcript using a color-coded process, and data were input into a spreadsheet to assist in the organization of the emergent themes. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) approach to data analysis of transcendental phenomenological research.

Findings and Discussion

The primary research question for this study asked, *How do African American women superintendents describe their lived experiences in acquiring superintendent positions in the state of Texas?* It was designed to examine the lived experiences of women African American superintendents and to provide these women with the framework to share their expert-level knowledge regarding the unique phenomenon of obtaining this position in a White male dominated field. In addressing the primary research question associated with this research study, three major themes emerged: (a) the participants' desire to impact others at various levels, (b) the participants' sources of personal strength, and (c) external support systems. Each of these major themes provided insight into the overall career experi-

ences of these African American women superintendents as they acquired their positions in the state of Texas. Specifically, the themes and subthemes provided knowledge of the challenges they experienced, the supports that they utilized, and the unique personal backgrounds that inspired each of them to pursue superintendent positions. Each of the major themes revealed subthemes that appeared in all of the participant interviews. Table 1 displays the major themes, subthemes, constructed meanings of the subthemes, and significant statements.

Challenges

Sub-question 1 asked, *What challenges have African American women superintendents in Texas encountered in acquiring superintendent positions?* Emergent subthemes were *formal preparation* and *reflecting on and learning from experiences*. The superintendents explained the importance of assuring their preparedness for the challenge of securing a high-level leadership position. Further, each participant shared the importance of positional knowledge and experiences that effectively prepared her for the position. In addition, although not a primary theme, many of the participants shared that they knew they were facing a

challenge as an African American woman seeking the position. One participant explained how her use of a search firm forced her to recognize her race and gender as a reality that she would face in seeking a position. Experiences like these are aligned to the concepts shared through Critical Race Theory–– concepts that recognize that racism exists in the world. Although their race and gender were thoughts that emerged in the stories of each participant, no one explicitly stated race or gender as challenges they faced.

The subtheme of *reflecting upon and learning from experiences* also played a role in the superintendents' challenges. Many of the participants shared negative past experiences involving the superintendency in which they were forced to do the work of the superintendent without being given the title. Facing the challenge of performing the job without the credit added to their drive to be prepared when their opportunity to obtain the position arose.

Support

Sub-question 2 asked, *What do African American women superintendents believe supported them in acquiring superintendent positions in the state of Texas?* The

Table 1

Description of Emergent Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Constructed Meaning	Example of Significant Statement
Desire to Impact Others at Various Levels	Students	The desire to impact the learning and success of the students within their district.	"You gotta do what you gotta do for children, and not worry about what people say about you, but just do your job."
	Teachers	The desire to impact the performance of teachers, which ultimately impacts student performance and success.	"To impact the lives of teachers that impact the lives of kids. That's the main thing."
	Community	The desire to give back to the community where they grew up and/or started their educational career.	"I worked here, and I took pride, and I was like, 'Somebody from here has to take the responsibility to make things better.' And I was like . . . I can do it."
	Future Leaders	The desire to give back and assist African American female administrators in their preparation for possible superintendent positions.	"Encouraging African American people of color to put themselves out there."
Sources of Personal Strength	Faith	Having a connection to a higher power to assist in day-to-day living and decisions.	"I know the direction God has given me as far as who I am and what I'm supposed to be doing."
	Formal Preparation	Those tasks done to get into a position to be ready for the superintendent position.	"I just wanted a lot and I wanted to be able to stand and in my mind it was stand against anybody: Black, White, male, female, and be just as competitive and just as knowledgeable."
	Humility	Keeping a level head despite serving the position of superintendent.	"I don't want to think too highly of myself."
	Reflecting on and learning from experiences	Framing experiences, both good and bad, in a light that allows for personal growth and learning.	"I've worked with some outstanding superintendents and I've worked with some who were not effective. All of them adding to the fabric of my character."
External Support Systems	Family	Having strong connections with immediate and extended family members.	"I don't have a big circle of friends. I have family."
	Friends	Having strong, supportive friendships that help to stay grounded.	"I have an excellent extended family in my friends."
	Mentors	Having professional colleagues to turn to for advice and support.	"A way that the African American females, and African American males, are interactive with each other and helping and supporting one another."

major theme of *external support systems* tied directly to this research question, including the subthemes of *family, friends, and mentors*. Each of the participants shared specific examples of the importance of family members, friends, and professional and personal mentors. All participants, with the exception of one, shared names of specific individuals whom they called upon to share ideas and gain general encouragement.

Personal Backgrounds

Sub-question 3 asked, *How have the personal backgrounds of select African American women superintendents contributed to their success in acquiring superintendent positions in Texas?* One consist theme found in each of the transcripts was the *importance of community ties*. Each participant remains connected to the community or area in which she grew up or started her career. Participants explained the importance that giving back to the community that supported them has had in their daily lives. In addition to supporting their communities, the participants also shared the importance of impacting others. Each of the participants also emphasized their passion for students and teachers and its importance throughout their career path to the superintendency. Having served as teachers and counselors in their school districts prior to becoming superintendents, participants provided evidence of continued commitment to positively impacting students and student achievement.

Connection to the Conceptual Frameworks

Two conceptual frameworks informed and grounded this study: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought. Both CRT and Black Feminist Thought promote the importance of understanding the unique experiences of African American women who currently serve as public school district superintendents. Hearing their stories and listening to their voices can provide additional knowledge and raises the consciousness of others.

Critical Race Theory

When analyzing research using a CRT lens, one understands the impact that race has on the societal structures in place in the world. As one of those societal constructs, education is directly impacted by issues surrounding race and racism in the United States. Through the acceptance of race as a permanent tenet in American society, educators can begin critical conversations regarding that impact of racism on the structures in various social atmospheres. By understanding and accepting the concepts expressed by CRT and its scholars, educators might better understand how the experiences of these African American women are unique and need to be heard. Through the telling of their stories, these women superintendents provided further insight into a population that encompasses less than 1% of the total population of superintendents in the state of Texas—African American women superintendents.

Black Feminist Thought. Black Feminist Thought places an emphasis on the experiences of African American women as opposed to the frames of knowledge based on the experiences of those in the majority (Collins, 2000). Aligned with Black Feminist Thought, discussion is warranted on the concept of *double consciousness*—the consciousness of being both African American and female. Although the intersection of African American and female identity was not explicitly stated as a challenge by the participants in this study, it emerged as a consciousness shared by each participant. Researchers have previously shared the idea that many African American women view their double minority status as a barrier to their entrance into the superintendency (Revere, 1987; Rowan, 2006; Smith, 2010). However, the participants in this research study did not embrace their double minority status as a barrier. Each of the participants acknowledged that they were African American and a woman and accepted that these traits played a factor in their daily experiences despite their continued striving for excellence and success.

Implications and Recommendations

There is a crucial need to increase the presence of the African American women in the superintendency in the state of Texas. As demographics of the state change and traditional minorities become the majority, it is necessary for minorities to receive opportunities for top-level school positions commensurate to their demographic composition in Texas public schools. Based on the literature review and results of this study, a number of steps are encouraged to increase the presence of African American women in the superintendency.

Potential job candidates should pursue formal preparation strategies such as seeking superintendent-like job experience and acquiring a doctorate. At the university level, leadership programs must effectively prepare future leaders for the superintendent position (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). By providing aspiring administrators with examples of the daily decisions of superintendents, including examples from African American women superintendents, programs can ensure that their graduates are attuned to the issues and decision-making skills needed to make tough choices.

Student internships can also enhance the experience of the learner in these programs.

Additionally, candidates should pursue informal preparation strategies such as building strong support systems. Mentoring at the university can serve to build the capacity of practicing administrators. Superintendent-level mentoring was noted as crucial both in the literature and in the participant interviews. Mentoring can also enhance networking and relationship building that may pay future dividends as candidates move into superintendent positions. Also, participation in professional associations that promote networking opportunities was strongly suggested by both the results of this study and the literature (Bulls, 1986; Dudek, 2012; McCord, Jordan, & Jordan, 2008; Moore, 2012). Exposing educators to others with superintendent experience can assist aspiring school leaders by providing opportunities for them to develop professional relationships and gain exposure to areas that may be unfamiliar or unknown.

Finally, superintendent preparation programs must do more to recruit minorities, particularly African American women. By increasing the number of individuals who possess superintendent certifications, school districts can increase the presence of those from traditionally marginalized groups, particularly African American women.

Future Research

Future research is needed to determine if this study's emergent themes are important factors in African American women attaining and sustaining superintendent positions. Consideration of the day-to-day challenges (e.g., board relations, community and parental involvement, and student success initiatives) experienced by these women may provide deeper insights into the experiences of African American women superintendents. A second potential area of research is the examination of other racial minority female superintendent experiences in the state of Texas. With the changing demographics of the state (TEA, 2014a), there is a need to increase the presence of women superintendents who identify as Latino or other minority groups. Similar conceptual frameworks could be applied in these future studies as well.

Another recommendation is to expand the scope of the present study to the Southern United States or the entire country. Due to the small sample size of this study, a larger number of participants might increase generalizability and create additional important findings. A comparative study could also examine the similarities and differences between the experiences of African American men and women superintendents

in their career journeys to superintendent positions. Finally, because many African American superintendents, both male and female, serve districts that are primarily minority, a last recommendation is to examine leadership styles and practices that appear most effective throughout a superintendent's career in minority majority districts. As the demographics of the state of Texas shift and expand, a need exists to assess how leaders, particularly African American superintendents, interact with their school communities in ways that meet the needs of students.

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Steering the Ship: Principles of Student Success for Organizational Change

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ABSTRACT: Researchers often use focus groups to collect data for qualitative research, but focus groups can also be used by organizational leaders to articulate participants' values or principles - principles that can be used to guide organizational change. This paper examines one staff's mobilization of a focus group to collect data for a research study they were conducting together to articulate programmatic principles. The collaborative nature of the group-work engaged and guided the participants in the generation of principles that were then used to guide program-wide development. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of the group encouraged engagement in the research from a partial participant and generated data that was used for triangulation in the grounded theory research being conducted. The principles indeed guided the educators in their research and in changing their school and impacted both their self and collective efficacy.

Keywords: focus groups, organizational change, teacher efficacy, education

Distributed leadership styles are both necessary and inevitable in the complex and constantly changing educational landscape (Harris, 2002). One way educational practitioners can begin to embody distributed leadership within schools is to generate a mission and vision by articulating principles together. Michael Quinn Patton (2011) suggests a helpful metaphor, comparing organizational principles to components of a recipe. Recipes, Patton asserts, are like rules, telling the cook exactly what amount of each ingredient to include. He suggests, however, that when a cook decides to "season to taste" (Patton, 2011, p. 167), the list of ingredients, and amounts of each, become a set of guidelines instead of rules. In a similar way, principles might be used to guiding organizational change, dependent on context and situation. They should be used to "season to taste." Patton suggests that principles serve other purposes, as well. When organiza-

tions articulate their guiding principles, staff can, in turn, utilize them as they engage in a sort of home-grown type of monitoring and evaluation (Quinn Patton, 2015, 2011).

Working together to articulate a set of guiding principles is a strategy that four teachers, one administrative assistant, one administrator, and I found to be successful in an alternative school in which we worked. We decided to articulate our central principles regarding our work with students – not rules but, rather, guidelines for our work with students. By creating principles together, we engaged in deep conversations about definitions of student success, instructional strategies, and pedagogical philosophies. We believe that the process of collaboratively creating principles and, furthermore, using the principles themselves to guide our continuous improvement, increased our efficacy (Mitchler, 2015), investment and, using the phrase of one leader in our district, helped us "steer the ship" together.

Theoretical Perspective

As individuals, we teachers and staff are unique in our histories and experiences; thus, we used a constructivist lens to frame our research, our focus group work and our work with our students. All of the educators at Ray of Light Alternative Learning Program (pseudonym)—myself included—proudly saw ourselves as learners. The work that we did together to uncover our conception of student success was indeed a joint effort, as we were all invested in the success of our students and our role in that success.

Social Constructivism

Because the impacts of language within educational settings are immense, evolutionary, and consequential, the theoretical perspective of social constructivism helped guide us in this work. Social constructivism has roots within the discipline of sociology and is rooted in the understanding that all knowledge is so-

cially constructed. Social constructivism points to questions like "How have people in this setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, 'truths,' explanations, beliefs and worldviews? What are the consequences of their construction of the world on their behaviors and for those with whom they interact?" (Patton, 2005). Social constructivism suggests that humans establish "truths" based on their experiences and perceptions. A constructivist researcher studies the realities, knowledge, and culture constructed by individuals and the consequences of those constructions on their lived experience. The principles of social constructivism were present in this study as we examined how we constructed our perceptions of our students, our work and ourselves.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

We also considered our efficacy as we engaged in this study. Researchers describe teacher self-efficacy as the extent to which a teacher believes they are capable of success; it is a teacher's conviction that they can influence student learning, even when working with difficult or seemingly unmotivated students (Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). The terms "capability" and "conviction" are used in this definition, as self-efficacy refers to self-perception of competency, not to actual levels of competence. The research of Ashton, Olejnik, Crocker, & McAuliffe (1982) showed that teacher efficacy has implications for pedagogical practices, student learning, classroom management, and teacher motivation.

Julian Rotter's work was fundamental to the development of early theories regarding self-efficacy and teacher efficacy. The RAND Organization's research on internal and external controls of reinforcement utilized Rotter's social learning theory as the basis for differentiating between *general teaching efficacy* and *personal teaching efficacy*. The former concept describes a teacher's beliefs about the power of external factors in a child's life, like violence at home, socio-economic status, race, and gender, in comparison to their capabilities as educators. Personal teaching efficacy, on the other hand, refers to the teacher's personal confidence—or lack thereof—in their training and experiences leading to success (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Teacher Collective Efficacy

Certainly, individual teachers might feel that they are capable of impacting students in all types of educational contexts on their own. However, teachers may see greater student engagement and achievement in certain educational settings when there is a sense of collective efficacy among the group. High collective efficacy is especially important within urban alternative schools, where—based on my experience—students value a sense of community and family among the staff. From my observations and own work experiences at Ray of Light Alternative Learning Program (ALP), when a group of teachers feels they are capable of accomplishing something important, like helping students find academic success, then they are more able to overcome adversity and achieve their goals.

According to Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000), collective teacher efficacy is the perception that a faculty, as a whole, impacts students and student achievement. It is also rooted in Bandura's social cognitive theory and self-efficacy theories. Collective efficacy stems from the interactions of all members of the group and is related to personal and general teacher efficacy. As such, collective efficacy is a measure of teachers' beliefs as a group in their capabilities as a team. Just as self-efficacy and teacher efficacy influence a person's choice of tasks, the amount of effort exerted on those tasks, persistence, and stress levels, so too does collective efficacy influence these factors. In general, the two most important factors in determining collective teacher efficacy are the perception of the difficulty of the task facing the group and the assessment of teaching competence across the group (Goddard et al., 2000).

Goddard et al. (2000) conceptualized collective efficacy similarly to Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) by theorizing that high collective teacher efficacy leads to the acceptance of more demanding tasks and more challenging goals. They also suggested that high collective efficacy may lead to better performance on accepted tasks. As we engaged in our focus group work, we remained cognizant of the positive impacts of collective efficacy on our continuous improvement as a team within our school.

By engaging in our focus group work, we hoped that creating the principles within our focus group sessions would aid us in data collection for our grounded theory research. At the time, we did not foresee that it might also help us create a list of values, which we, could use to guide changes within the organization. Our method for creating guiding principles, what data we collected and analyzed to determine if, and to what extent, the principles were being used by staff, is described below.

Method

Our decision to generate principles for our work within Ray of Light Alternative Learning Program was one that arose from a collaborative research pro-

ject we undertook together. As a group, we knew that *success* was a term that frequently appeared in educational contexts, but the term, itself, was often elusive and difficult to define. We felt that articulating what student success was from our perspective, and who had agency over it, might influence our efficacy, particularly seeing as we were the social actors charged with impacting it. During data collection for that research project, we created a focus group. During our focus group sessions, we articulated principles of our work with students, and, to our surprise, these principles became extremely valuable, even after our grounded theory research had concluded. Although this text does not detail the larger grounded theory study, here, I detail one, initially tangential, outcome of our collaborative research that has helped shape the alternative program.

Participants

In order to maintain privacy, I have assigned each participant a pseudonym. All of these participants verbally committed to participating in this study. One female, Heather, taught mathematics and was seeking her master's degree at the time of our research. She was in her third year of full-time teaching; she spent all three of those years in this urban alternative school, Ray of Light ALP. A male science teacher, Chris, was mid-career and also seeking a master's degree. He had worked in alternative education in several different states and was in his second year of work within Ray of Light. Rex, the other male teacher, taught social studies, had a bachelor's degree, and had been working within the alternative school for over 20 years. Additionally, Gertrude, a novice teacher, began teaching one English class period per day at Ray of Light during the second and third trimesters. Gertrude was excited to take part in our work; she and I meet regularly throughout the duration of our research to discuss the data and analysis.

The author was also a participant in this study. At the time of the study, she was in her ninth year of teaching English, and was pursuing a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. She spent her initial year within the district working at the traditional high school within the building and the following three years teaching English within this urban alternative school.

The author suspected from the onset that one participant in particular, Rex, would not be interested in contributing as much to this study as the others. Rex worked a second job outside of this school, so he was quite guarded with his time. He initially opted to be only a partial participant, but to my surprise, he was a full participant by the end of the study. He contribut-

ed to theories and elected to start his master's degree work over the following summer.

The two administrators who oversaw the Ray of Light program also served as participants. Sally, the program coordinator, worked as a technologies educator for several years before obtaining a master's degree in social work as well as a counseling license. At the time of our study, she had just completed her administrator's license. Peg, the program secretary, was the woman who students, parents, and community members first met when they entered the Ray of Light ALP. She had worked as an administrative assistant for the traditional secondary school and for the ALP for over 20 years.

When I began my research, Heather, Chris, Rex, and I had been collaborating with each other at Ray of Light for two years, and we had become quite close. As a group, we explicitly prided ourselves on our "family-like" community within the school.

In engaging in our qualitative study, we attempted to generate a grounded theory about our conceptions of success within the alternative learning context. In our research, we pursued the research question: How do we, the staff at our urban, alternative secondary school, conceptualize success? The results of that research have been published as a part of my doctoral dissertation (Mitcher, 2015). The method described below is the method we used to gather data for that research, and it is also the method we later learned helped us articulate our guiding principles for organizational change, the focus of this article.

Procedure

We conducted our qualitative research over six months, working to develop a grounded theory about what led to student success in our ALP. During our data collection for that research, we met as pairs to interview each other, we observed each other in our work with students, and formed a focus group to discuss the data we collected. It was our intent, at the onset of the focus group work, to generate a set of principles from our data to guide our work with students. In total, we recorded six hours of focus group work and discussion, and I coded the transcribed conversations as part of our data analysis for our grounded theory research.

We did not create principles in a focus group for the purpose of organizational guidance and change. We knew that focus groups were powerful ways for teams to collect qualitative data, particularly in grounded theory research (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2002), so, as we were seeking to generate a grounded

theory around our perception of student success, we initially gathered as a focus group in the hopes of using the group conversations for data collection. Therefore, we started our work knowing that one way to elicit evocative information during focus group work as participant-researchers was by working collectively to articulate our guiding principles. We worked together to articulate our philosophies and vision, instead of a list of best practices or answering a series of interview questions, as is more traditionally done in focus group sessions (Kitzinger, 1995), and, broadly, qualitative research.

We arranged to hold two 90 minute focus group sessions during which we discussed our research question and some of the data and analysis as a group. We organized for our first meeting at a local restaurant after school. I prepared a framework to guide our conversation (see Appendix A). In this document, I proposed several elements or categories of student success that we had identified through initial coding of our interview and observation data, and I explained Patton's (2011) concept of a guiding principle. I've included some dialogue from our conversations below so that my role as the facilitator and my contributions to the conversations are both explicit.

In what follows, I speak of the interconnectedness of the categories the participants had been mentioning, noticing that one category stands out more than the others. I mention that observation to the group:

> Jenna: I'll tell you that what I was thinking is how these categories overlap or are in tension with each other, but there's a big spider web, right? It's all interconnected, but we seem to keep saying that relationships have to come first.
>
> Peg: Yeah, that's hard, you know, last year I tried to build a relationship with Deidra, but I just couldn't. I think everything I said went in one ear and out the other. I mean, it's a start [to building a relationship], but…
>
> Sally: We don't know their barriers to doing that. We have no clue what's going on at home. We don't know if they are taking care of kids or what's going on in their lives.
>
> Peg: And I tried to get that out of her but…
>
> Chris: I don't know. I still think the relationships are the most important.
>
> Sally: Absolutely.
>
> Peg: Yes.

Before this first focus group session, I used the data we had previously collected to generate three different diagrams of student success as our major codes (relationships, student attendance, credit completion, and happiness). The group liked the diagrams, which provoked further dialogue:

> Chris: Show us another picture.
>
> Sally: Yeah, show us another picture. We like the pictures.
>
> Jenna: Ok, well this one gets a little confusing. Ok… here's another one. So, I have success in the middle. These lines are suggesting that these are the categories that we think are contributing to success. What are your thoughts?

Each time the group saw a diagram I had created in preparation for our focus group session, I asked them for feedback.

During our second focus group session, I provided the group with a list of the principles of student success that we discussed before the close of our first focus group session. For the first 17 minutes of this second session, we discussed student attendance and whether we should or should not include a reference to it in one of our principles of student success. In this select transcription of dialog, we determined that relationships are ultimately linked to attendance and, thus, relationships, more than academic success, are directly linked to attendance first. I guided our conversation by asking questions that required more than a single word answer, using words like "why" and "what":

> Jenna: Why is attendance so important to us if the students can take the final summative assessments and pass them without being here?
>
> Heather: But can they?
>
> Chris: Well, it's standards-based. If the students haven't met all of the standards, they won't get a good score on the summative.
>
> Jenna: What is it about attendance and being present?

Following these two separate focus group sessions, we met regularly, at least three times per week, for 30 minutes each. During these meetings, held either before school or during our lunch break, we revised our principles of student success. The goal of each revision was to articulate principles that were concise, principles that were representative of the data we'd collected throughout the grounded theory research and principles that were in the format suggested by

Patton (2011).After our research concluded, I took note of when staff mentioned the principles in conversations or to me directly. Upon finding that the principles we generated were used to guide decisions within the organization, I interviewed the coordinator of the alternative learning program, who affirmed this finding.

Results and Discussion

As a group of educational practitioners, we found that conducting focus group sessions rooted in a principles-focused approach (Patton, 2011) allowed us to both gather data for our grounded theory and create principles that would guide our work.

The outcome of our grounded theory research, my dissertation work, was a theory regarding how staff within our alternative learning program conceptualized student success. That theory included three elements of student success including authentic relationships with staff, student engagement in academics, and staff emphasis on students' desired futures (Mitchler, 2015).

As I collected observational data and transcribed auto recordings of our staff meetings after the focus group sessions had concluded, I noticed that we referred to the principles we had generated often. We often used them to consider how we might develop programs to strengthen relationships between students and staff and help our students increase attendance and academic achievement. Following our focus group sessions, I received a total of seven text messages, spread over two months, from two participants suggesting that they had used our principles to guide their work with students. One participant stated, "… It really is all about the relationships." Additionally, the program coordinator created a poster with the principles listed and posted it at the entrance of Ray of Light. At professional learning community (PLC) meetings and often during social time with staff, we all found ourselves referencing the principles we created together proving to us that, indeed, the process of generating principles led to our increased awareness of programmatic goals and helped us "steer the ship" that was our organization.

There was evidence that the process of generating principles of student success also increased our efficacy. The teachers and I were more confident that our interactions with students led to student success. During our last focus group session, for example, Chris noted that it takes "a special kind of person" to work with students within an alternative learning program:

Chris: It's important that the students are in class because then there are more opportunities. You know, it's not just academic opportunities, but opportunities to build relationships. We can have conversations and say things like, "You haven't been here much lately, and I see you're not feeling well…" or, um "what are you going to do next after this school year?" It's an opportunity to talk about the life stuff.

Sally: Yeah.

Heather: Yup.

Chris: You know, it takes a special kind of person to be in an ALP environment. It can't just be anybody. So many people come and go from this system. You have to be able to get kids to trust you.

Sally: Yeah. That goes back to relationships, then. They are so important.

We also noticed that one partial participant who was previously reluctant to engage in our grounded theory research was increasingly motivated to take part in focus group sessions when he learned that the conversations were related to our alternative learning program's philosophies and ideologies. The hesitant participant asked about our principles during one follow-up session, asking if he could provide some feedback; he wanted to be a part of articulating principles that ultimately described and guided our organization and increased their involvement.

Furthermore, we found that the conversations we had during focus group work and later transcribed for use in our grounded theory research paralleled the data we had collected through our interviews and observations.

Through taking part in this focus group, we were specifically able to conclude the following:

1. A focus group allowed us to articulate our program's principles, which we then used to guide our actions, even after the conclusion of our grounded theory research.

2. Focus group discussions, aimed at articulating principles, recruited participation in our research from a previously reluctant participant.

3. Our focus group's conversations, and the principles we generated, provided data that we were able to use for data triangulation as we generated our grounded theory regarding

student success.

Although I did not use an efficacy measurement tool to measure teacher efficacy before and after our work together, I predict that teachers' efficacy increased, in part, through participation in our focus groups. Teachers took the opportunity in the sessions to persuade each other that they were making an impact on students. They also suggested that we continue using the principles we'd created to set goals for ourselves and our professional learning community (PLC) during the following school year.

As I am writing this article, the teachers involved in this study continue to contribute their ideas and thoughts, particularly about the guiding principles we generated, through text messages, emails, and informal conversations. Furthermore, the coordinator of the program has posted the principles near the front entrance of the school, and the staff continues to use them to guide their decision-making. Their ongoing commitment to this work leads me to believe that they continue to find ways to meaningfully shape the alternative learning program as they continue doing meaningful work with vulnerable and promising students.

Discussion

Before our first focus group session, the group had intentions only to gather data for the grounded theory study we were conducting. However, after we had articulated what we believed to be principles of student success, we began using them to guide our work – we referenced them in PLC conversations, text messaged each other when we noticed we had been using them, and the coordinator posted them outside the entrance to the ALP. Furthermore, there was evidence that participants felt more confident in their work as educators.

Implications

Our group realized that focus group work done in the spirit of articulating our principles of student success had many benefits. We were able to collect qualitative data for our collaborative research and generate a set of principles around which we could anchor our work as educational practitioners. Outside of the benefits the principles-focused group had for our continuous improvement, we believe that this process might be meaningful for leadership within organizations seeking to collectively articulate their philosophies and ultimately achieve programmatic or organizational change.

We also believe that our findings may be useful for other alternative learning programs and schools. Through articulating guiding principles, other schools

might also find they can play a role in both describing what they do that leads to student success and in gaining a heightened sense of collective efficacy. We were proud of our articulation of our work with students and evidence of that can still be seen at Ray of Light ALP. Upon entering Ray of Light ALP, one can still see the principles of student success our group articulated. The program coordinator has published and posted them in a glass-enclosed case outside the main office.

We also believe that gaps within the functioning of an organization might become apparent through this work. For example, after we concluded our research, the staff and I noticed that academic rigor was not specifically called out in our guiding principles or in our grounded theory. In noticing the lack of reference to academic rigor, we began deeply reflecting on our program's course offerings. We began questioning how our curriculum and instruction varied from the curriculum and instruction in traditional educational settings elsewhere in our school district and why.

Limitations

One thing that became apparent to us was that our guiding principles represented the perspective of the adults at Ray of Light ALP. Missing was the voice of the students. In future work, we'd like to include student perspectives in focus group work to more holistically capture the values and philosophies of all stakeholders.

Conclusion

One of the key purposes of the Principal Research Center and the Journal of School Administration Research and Development is to contribute to high-quality education for students through the development of school leaders in the nation's schools. This principles-focused approach to organizational change shows that administrators, seen traditionally as the leaders within schools, can work collaboratively with teachers, administrative assistants and, potentially, students to envision and guide change. Collaborative leadership rooted in shared principles can be the basis for that visioning and change.

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Promising Practices: Building the Next Generation of School Leaders

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ABSTRACT: This study applies transformational leadership theory practices to examine the purposeful ways in which principals work to build the next generation of teacher leaders in response to the shortage of K-12 principals. Given the impact principals have on student development and the shortage of those applying for the principalship, the purpose of this cross-case analysis was to discover how principals build leadership capacity at their respective school sites and groom individuals for leadership roles. Further, this study explored teacher perceptions of the practices in addition to factors that facilitated or inhibited the implementation of the principals' practices. Three school principals served as the primary participants for this research, and data were gleaned from interviews, observations, and artifacts. Findings indicated that the principals fostered leadership capacity by providing authentic administrative opportunities for teachers pursuing the administration credential. Additionally, the principals' methods for building leadership capacity were positively perceived by the identified teacher leaders. Factors that facilitated leadership capacity development include school and district systems and structures, while factors that inhibited teachers' development include psychological concerns. This study illuminates the need for principals to build leadership capacity at their school sites in order to purposefully prepare teacher leaders for principal succession.

Keywords: Education, school leadership, succession planning, transformational leadership, principals

Leadership is known to impact all types of groups and organizations, as studies from a variety of industries indicate that leadership is a significant factor in an organization's success (Bass, 2008; Collins, 2001; Northouse, 2013; O'Reilly, Caldwell, Chatman, Lapiz, & Self, 2010). Given that the very nature of education is to develop human beings, the impact that leadership has on student achievement and development is a critical factor that cannot be ignored (Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010; Seashore Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Wahlstrom, Seashore Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). As the predominant school leader, principals play a critical role in the success of schools (Marzano, Water, & McNulty, 2005). However, recruitment and development of leaders to fill site administrative positions has become a national and global problem (Brooking, Collins, Court, & O'Neill, 2003; Fink & Brayman, 2006). As a result, schools and districts increasingly seek ways to find high-quality principal candidates who can fill vacancies and move schools toward greater success. Unfortunately, the problem is not simply a shortage of people with administrative credentials. Given that many teachers obtain administrative credentials, potential school leaders exist within the teaching ranks (DeAngelis & O'Connor, 2012). However, teachers frequently choose not to pursue an administrative path due in part to a lack of recruitment and development of latent teacher leadership potential (Fink, 2011; Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011; Peters, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that 13,000 principal positions will need to be filled nationally between 2012 and 2022, while state projections such as those in California estimate the need for 5,000 school administrators between 2008 and 2018 (White, Fong, & Makkonen, 2010). Current data attribute the problem of filling leadership positions to several factors, including candidates who lack the necessary skill sets, vacancies created by retirements, general attrition, and teachers lacking motiva-

tion to move into school administration (Kearney, 2010).

Kearny (2010) found that in California there are sufficient administrative credential holders to fill the state's vacancies, but these teachers are not moving into administrative positions. For example, in the 2011-2012 academic year, 1,535 California educators became eligible for administrative positions, but only 332 of them were working in such positions the following year (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2014). DeAngelis and O'Connor (2012) found similar results in Illinois, where 60% of administrative certificate holders were not serving in administrative positions even six years following initial credential attainment. While teachers are obtaining minimum requirements necessary for administrative licensure, only a small proportion of them are seeking employment in an administrative capacity. In addition, human resource personnel are often finding administrator candidates ill-prepared to take on the challenges of school administration (DeAngelis & O'Connor, 2012; Fink, 2011). The shortage of qualified principal candidates who desire to become school administrators can be attributed in part to a lack of leadership capacity cultivation of potential administrators (Fink, 2011)

Upon close examination of the school leadership pipeline, a major problem emerges on how to best identify, recruit, and train educators who will develop into strong principals capable of positively impacting student learning and achievement. In seeking to solve this problem, an initial course of action is to investigate the promising practices principals use to build leadership capacity in teachers who will become future school administrators.

Review of Literature

Cultivating teacher leadership is a multi-level undertaking involving the state, district, and school (Heneman & Milanowski, 2011). Human capital management practices are enacted at the district and school level; therefore, this study will begin by examining principal leadership succession practices with a wide lens by initially exploring district level practices from a systems perspective before delving into a narrower focus on school level succession planning practices.

District Level Practices

Research supports the idea that intentional succession planning is important for lasting organizational success (Collins, 2001). Studies show that effective succession planning by school districts must link aspects of identification, induction, forecasting, and on-

going administrator learning (Fink, 2010, 2011; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Peters, 2011). Fink and Brayman (2006) and Fink (2011) examined succession practices by districts in three regions of three different countries, finding that intentional planning for principal succession that involved developing leadership capacity within a district leads to positive outcomes for schools and students. Similarly, Peters' (2011) case study analysis of principal succession in one urban district further supported the idea that schools and students benefit when succession is planned and supports are provided for schools and administrators who experience leadership transitions. However, intentional succession planning is not a common practice in most school districts (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006), and plans that exist are often widely varied with differing levels of success.

In response to the research findings, Fink (2010, 2011) challenged education systems to strategically address principal succession and create a reservoir of leadership talent that could fill administrative vacancies from within an organization. Fink (2011) described the most common strategy to principal succession as a "hire and hope" approach. Relying upon this approach also requires depending on the unknowns of principal candidate school leadership preparation. Fink (2010) chronicled the trajectory many districts take in dealing with principal succession. He found that school districts are initially uninvolved in the beginning stages as teachers self-select to attend an administrative credentialing program. These programs are often sponsored either by universities or other educational organizations and vary widely in the quality of the training they provide to candidates. School districts then post openings for school principals and subsequently wait to see who applies from this group, hoping to get a qualified candidate. In contrast to these practices, Fink (2010) recommends the creation of a pipeline for leadership succession that extends from a leadership reservoir and takes on a "grow your own approach" to filling vacancies (p. 681).

In another study, Zepeda, Bengtson, and Parylo (2011) conducted a cross-case analysis of school districts in the United States that claimed to be using succession planning. They found that larger, urban districts tend to have more formalized plans for filling administrative positions, whereas smaller districts have less formalized succession plans. The researchers also uncovered four emergent themes. The first represented a sense of urgency especially existent in larger districts that were prone to require filling vacancies more frequently. A second theme drew atten-

tion to the various ways districts provided for the development of leaders, including some that used standards to drive learning and assess leadership qualities, such as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and those of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). A third theme, mentoring, was a core component of succession planning in all districts. Mentoring as an element of leadership capacity building is found prominently across many studies examining administration succession planning, professional growth, and credentialing programs (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Russell & Sabina, 2014; Zepeda et al., 2011). A final theme identified in the study was the building of collaborative relationships with organizations outside of the districts, such as universities who participated in administrator preparation (Zepeda et al., 2011).

In summary, research on district-level succession planning has illustrated the importance of filling vacancies and maintaining school growth in a strategic manner. In doing so, districts can fill vacancies with effective principals and increase the chances that school improvements will be sustained through the leadership change.

School Level Practices

Along with district level practices, research has also explored principal practices employed at the school level to identify and recruit successors. For instance, Myung et al. (2011) conducted a quantitative study of teachers, assistant principals, and principals in the Miami-Dade school district following the 2007-2008 academic year. Participants were surveyed on whether they had been *tapped* for the principal role, or informally recruited and deliberately developed in their leadership capacity by an administrator. Results showed that 72% of principals and 52% of assistant principals were tapped by a principal prior to entering school administration. Results also indicated that gender and race are significant predictors of being tapped. Within schools, male teachers were twice as likely to be tapped as their female counterparts, and Black and Hispanic teachers were more likely to be tapped than their White colleagues. These findings were discovered after controlling for teacher leadership capabilities, suggesting current principals tap and promote teachers that resemble them in appearance and background.

The challenges in developing teacher leadership vary, but an ever-present hurdle stems from the notion that teachers are part of an egalitarian culture (Donaldson et al., 2008). Teachers veering toward leadership roles are often unaware of the unwritten rules of education. Traditionally, teachers are autonomous professionals and those in position of seniority are often unappreciative of newcomers' leadership authority (Donaldson et al., 2008). Under an egalitarian reign, all teachers are equal and are expected to put up a united front. Those willing to take risks by seeking or being appointed to leadership roles place themselves in direct conflict with their teacher peers (Donaldson et al., 2008; Fairman & MacKenzie, 2014; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Embedded within the teacher socialization process is the notion that teachers are followers and should remain focused on their classroom duties (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Moreover, in this era of multiple school reforms and heightened accountability, principals are tasked with many responsibilities, and one area of particular struggle is investing in school culture and climate. Research posits that positive school climate fosters leadership development (Drago-Severson, 2012), but with little time available to devote to school culture and climate, teacher leadership will not develop. To that end, teachers successfully mentored by the principal are often accused by their peers of being the "principal's pet" (Donaldson et al., 2008). To avoid this title and association, teachers in leadership roles frequently refrain from celebrating leadership successes or acknowledgements (Fairman & MacKenzie, 2014).

Overall, research on how principals identify teachers for leadership positions is scant and predominantly depicts informal methods. The research also reflects identification and recruitment practices that follow traditional methods of self-selection for licensure, with little innovation devoted to recruiting the younger generation of teachers to pursue administration (Fink, 2010). Further, scholarship is limited in that it predominately dwells on district failures in principal succession management planning rather than illuminating promising practices to recruit leaders. The present study attempted to bridge the gap in literature and give insight into practices used to cultivate the next generation of principal leaders.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the promising practices that principals engage in to create a reservoir of quality leaders to fill school principal positions. To gain insight into the experiences of principals' leadership succession practices, the research team collaboratively posed three research questions:

- In what ways do principals work to build the next generation of leaders?

- What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the influence of those practices?

- What are the factors that both facilitate and inhibit the development and implementation of strategies designed to build leadership capacity?

Methods

A qualitative case study design was used to produce a rich description and acquire a thorough understanding of the participants' thoughts about leadership succession management practices (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The cross-case analysis in this study provided for enhanced external validity of the findings (Merriam, 2009). To triangulate the findings, this study accessed data through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Document analysis entailed evaluating job descriptions, résumés, school policies, the School Accountability Report Card (SARC), and leadership meeting minutes. Furthermore, to garner a deeper understanding of the phenomenon related to building leadership capacity (Maxwell, 2013) and explore the relationship between leaders and followers, this research study was grounded in a transformational leadership theory. At the core of this framework were three of the five exemplary leadership practices identified by Kouzes and Posner (2008). These practices, which can be applied to principal leadership succession management, are *enable others to act, inspire a shared vision,* and *model the way*.

Participants

This study's primary participants were school principals who used promising practices to build leadership capacity in teachers they determined as having potential to move into school administration. Purposive sampling was used to select the principals fulfilling three specific criteria: (a) he or she served in the role for more than three to five years; (b) he or she reported to purposefully build leadership capacity in teachers with the intent of encouraging them to move into school administration; and (c) one or more of his or her tapped teachers was pursuing or was already in a school administration position. The principals and sites were selected through multiple means including email recruitment through a superintendent as well as recruitment at a state school administrators' association conference. Selection resulted in three principals: Ms. Garcia, a K-8 elementary school principal; Mr. Roth, a high school principal; and Mrs. Devon, a K-5 elementary school principal. Each principal served in this administrative role for 10 or more years, and all principals were serving in ethnically diverse schools in Southern California. Two principals led elementary

schools with a range of 600 to 724 students while another was responsible for leading a high school of 2,376 students.

Along with principals, snowball sampling was used to identify 20 additional participants to inform the study. The participants included superintendents, teacher leaders identified as being tapped for leadership capacity development, and assistant principals who were mentored into their role. Although the small participant sample size impeded generalization, it allowed for rich participant perspectives of their experiences during the leadership succession management process (Gall et al., 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Data Collection and Analysis

All participants in this study were provided with an introductory letter informing them of the purpose of the study and the role they would play in providing data for the research. Participants were also assured that their anonymity would be maintained through the use of pseudonyms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principals, current teachers, and former teachers who were tapped by the principal and subsequently moved into school administration. These interviews, coupled with observations and document analysis, served to provide data for the study. Questions in the interview protocols addressed the study's three research questions and were developed in collaboration with the research team. In advance of the interviews, all protocols were piloted to ensure that questions were clear and that responses addressed the research questions. Data from each source were compiled and analyzed using Creswell's (2014) model for qualitative data analysis with the theoretical lens of three of Kouzes and Posner's (2008) transformational practices: inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, and modeling the way. In alignment with the model, data were analyzed for emergent themes and then clustered into salient and recurring themes that addressed the research questions.

Findings

This cross-case analysis sought to illuminate and differentiate the promising practices that some school principals use to build leadership capacity in teachers who have been tapped to move into school administration and fill the reservoir of high-quality principal candidates. The findings of this study aimed to provide insight for school principals who wish to build capacity in teachers who will become the next generation of principals.

Strategies in Building Leadership Capacity

Three emergent themes were derived from research

question one and shed light on the practices that school principals use to build leadership capacity in tapped teachers. It was found that the culture that principals created inspired a shared vision and enabled others to act. Additionally, the opportunities of tapped teachers for authentic practice in administrative duties aligned to the practice of enabling others to act. Lastly, the principals' leadership ideologies drew them to mentor the tapped teachers, modeling the way for these teachers to build a career in a leadership role.

Culture

Creating a culture that is structured around positive relationships, accessibility, clear values, and vision provided a base from which the three principals worked to build leadership capacity in teachers. All three principals built positive relationships with tapped teachers, whereby teachers felt cared about and invested in both professionally and personally. Mr. Roth remarked that building positive relationships with his tapped teachers was the most powerful tool he had in developing them as future administrators. He shared, "I believe in relationships. People realize I do care about them and I hope that we can build good relationships so that I can then invest in them." A second principal, Ms. Garcia, developed her nurturing, relational approach after experiencing an unsupportive relationship with a former school administrator. She believed this inhibited her leadership capacity growth and conscientiously decided to tap teachers differently. Ms. Garcia explained, "We are very different [describing her previous administrator]; I lead more through nurturing, modeling, and encouragement." Despite differing pathways, all three principals shared a common belief in building a culture where positive relationships offer support and encouragement to those teachers who would go on to be the next generation of principals.

In addition to a culture that included valuing positive relationships, the principals developed school cultures that inspired a shared vision and enabled others to act––two of the three transformational leadership practices that framed this study. All principals provided a strong vision for their schools, particularly for those teachers with whom they were building leadership capacity. This vision centered on individuals striving for personal and professional growth and success. Tapped teachers commented on their principals' vision for improvement and growth: "He was very consistent about sharing with me the fact that I had the capacity to do what I wanted to do as a leader ––that I could be an effective school administrator." Another tapped teacher observed, "[My principal] is

always looking for ways for us to grow and to be better individually and as a school." The collaborative efforts of moving teachers into the principal pipeline stemmed from principals' positive relationships and clear values and vision around self-improvement.

Opportunities for Authentic Practice

A second theme was that all three principals provided tapped teachers with opportunities for authentic administrative practice. The principals allowed teachers to develop their administrative skills and knowledge by delegating to them some administrative duties at their respective sites. For example, Mrs. Devon frequently started by giving tapped teachers experiences in managing students by saying, "Okay, you are in charge of discipline while I'm gone." She subsequently walked them through the challenges that emerged and provided support as they managed the difficult discipline situations. One tapped teacher explained the opportunities to do administrative work under his principal: "You get to *be* [emphasis added] an administrator; you may not have the title or pay, but you are doing the *real* [emphasis added] work that school principals and assistant principals do." Providing opportunities for authentic practice is a critical strategy in building leadership capacity in teachers who have been tapped for the principalship.

Personal Ideology

Along with opportunities for authentic practice, the findings also revealed that the principals' personal ideologies contributed to the growth and development of future school administrators. All principals examined believed that their role was to build capacity in others, particularly those teachers who would go on to become school administrators. By enacting this ideology, the principals inspired a shared vision for tapped teachers, moving them toward reaching the goal of becoming effective school administrators (Northouse, 2013).

While all three principals examined shared a personal mission to assist others in becoming effective school principals, the source of this ideology differed between them. For instance, Ms. Garcia held strong beliefs about helping those who face larger obstacles to success. She characterized her ideology as an "immigrant mentality." Her family's experiences as Cuban immigrants coming to the United States drove her to push toward something better, and she desired to inspire this sentiment in those she taps. In particular, she felt strongly about empowering women to succeed in school administration, and she referenced a quote she has hanging in her office that summarized her beliefs: "A great woman doesn't know she's great.

A great woman creates other great women."

In contrast, Mrs. Devon felt her professional success was contingent upon building leadership capacity in others. Her ideology centered on the mutual benefits of tapping teachers for school administration, which allowed her to derive satisfaction from others who attributed their success to her leadership. Mrs. Devon's source of motivation for capacity building in others stemmed from a desire for professional satisfaction and upward mobility. She prided herself on the number of teacher leaders she had hired, stating she looks for individuals with a "natural sense of perseverance, and strength, and undying desire to move forward."

Unlike Mrs. Devon, Mr. Roth's ideology emanated from a core belief that his life's purpose was to build capacity in others. He explained, "I personally want to be better tomorrow than I am today. I want to be sure everyone on this campus is the same way." He added, "Leadership never stops; I ask, 'How can I build up new leaders?' Building the capacity to help others lead is paramount in my duties. Leadership is a journey that I embrace and, when looking at people, one I can give back to." Despite differing sources of the ideology that motivated these principals to build leadership capacity in teachers, all three worked to ensure their teachers were given multiple opportunities to become successful school administrators.

Perceptions of Practices

The second research question explored the perceptions that tapped teachers construct around the principals' efforts to build leadership capacity. Exploring the perceptions of these teachers contributes to a greater understanding of the promising practices that principals use to build capacity in teachers who will potentially move into school administration. The findings revealed that the teachers valued the relationships with their principals and perceived these relationships as conduits for leadership development. The positive relationships were seen as a foundation for effective mentoring and coaching in school administration. Furthermore, it was through the practice in authentic administrative settings that teachers felt they were being prepared to be effective principals.

Valuing Relationships and Mentoring

Tapped teachers perceived that positive relationships that included encouragement were instrumental to their growth as future principals. One teacher described how his principal helped him to learn from failure in a safe and supportive environment. The teacher shared, "He's like, 'This can't happen again,'

and then went on to say 'pick yourself up and brush yourself off, let's go.' I felt like it was safe to fail, that he doesn't judge, he models improvement and he's trying to push people to be better." Another teacher spoke of the relational support and subsequent learning that took place with her principal: "She encouraged me to go for admin . . . She kept telling me, 'Go. Move. You need to go for it. You're ready. You can do it.' Slowly, she started giving me leadership roles at the school and let me do it my way. Eventually I became the administrative designee. Then, I was feeling like I wanted to do something bigger." Similarly, another teacher commented on an opportunity to work alongside Mrs. Devon in a summer school setting and on administrative credential coursework. The teacher described, "I was there with her and able to walk around; the exposure was just awesome. She's giving us opportunities to succeed without doing the job for us." Tapped teachers viewed these mentoring opportunities as significant factors contributing to their leadership capacity development.

Valuing Authentic Practice

In addition to valuing positive relationships, teachers viewed the opportunities to complete authentic administrative tasks as critical to their development as school administrators. All three principals provided substantial opportunities for tapped teachers to work in an administrative capacity. Through their principal feedback, teachers regarded the authentic experiences as beneficial to their growth as future principals. One teacher described his view of the opportunities provided by his principal: "As one [tapped for the principalship], you're really going to learn the job. Whether it be spending days in the office, or substituting when an administrator is out for meetings or having the opportunity to take care of a project." Another tapped teacher shared that because she was entrusted to run a workshop, she felt encouraged to continue to pursue other leadership tasks. She stated, "So the principal asked me to give a training . . . She supported me in doing it how I wanted, and I ended up creating a full day of professional development for two schools in our district." Teachers tapped for school administration also valued the strategies that principals used to build leadership capacity in them. In particular, the positive relationships with their principals coupled with opportunities to perform authentic administrative work were critical to their development as the next generation of school principals.

Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors

The third research question sought to delineate the factors that both facilitate and inhibit the leadership

capacity building of teachers who will become school administrators. With increased demands placed upon current principals and limited number of candidates prepared to take over the principal position (DeAngelis & O'Connor, 2012; Fink, 2011), it is crucial to identify successful methods of preparing and securing future principals in addition to identifying impeding factors that can be minimized.

Facilitating Factors

Facilitating factors that supported the leadership development of teachers included school structures that allowed for tapped teachers to take on additional leadership roles. The three principals in this study provided commitments of time and finances to support teachers' work in administrative roles. The principals set aside site funds to pay for substitutes to occasionally release their teachers from the classroom to allow them to work on administrative tasks. Mr. Roth commented on this commitment by sharing, "I am probably spending more money that way than any other principal in our district. I think it's important though." Other structures included principals creating schedules that allowed tapped teachers to lead teacher teams and promote collaboration at their respective school sites. For example, Ms. Garcia noted, "We do a lot of collaboration and I have the teachers teach each other . . . it's a pain for our office manager, but it's super important that the teachers get their time together."

While two of the principals relied heavily on their own school sites to facilitate the building of leadership capacity in tapped teachers, one had more significant involvement in leadership development from the district office level. In Mrs. Devon's school, in addition to site commitments of time and financial resources, the small size of the district allowed for district administrators to also be involved in the support and development of tapped teachers. One teacher shared, "The superintendent told me, 'I'm up late, if you have any questions give me a call.' I don't think you would hear that in a larger district." This superintendent expressed the involvement in leadership succession planning at the district level: "I'm always looking for leaders for the next level. I'm always strategic. I know right now who I think can be promoted." This promote-from-within mindset facilitated the leadership capacity building in tapped teachers, as they were confident that they might be able to secure an administrative position in their current district.

Unlike his counterparts, Mr. Roth's tapping of teachers was systematic and formalized at his school site. Tapped teachers were called interns and fre-

quently served in this capacity for multiple years, gaining extensive experience and development in school leadership. Interns were identified formally and their annual administrative roles were delineated in the site's organizational chart. Mr. Roth realized that his method was unconventional. He explained, "This chart shows the areas of responsibility for each of us, including my interns. I would venture to say that most other schools don't do something like that." Flexibility in how the principals organized their school site structure and commitment to both time and finances all served to facilitate leadership capacity building among tapped teachers.

Inhibiting Factors

Two themes emerged that suggested some factors also inhibit the implementation of strategies to build leadership capacity in tapped teachers: additional stress and colleague resistance. First, teachers who have been tapped for leadership development felt added stress caused by the additional work they assume while playing an administrative role. One teacher commented, "It was like I had both jobs putting pressure on me, that was hard." Another teacher corroborated this additional pressure: "My [administrative] project is pretty intense and very important to the school, but my students are important to me, too; it's difficult to manage the two things competing for my attention." Serving dual roles as a teacher and aspiring administrator contributed to additional stress.

Second, strategies to build leadership were often impeded by the negative perceptions of some teacher colleagues who felt tapped teachers challenged the established norms and roles of teachers and administrators. Several tapped teachers interviewed suggested that negative attitudes, comments, and resistance from colleagues were a part of their experiences. Donaldson et al. (2008) discovered that designating formal leadership roles deviated from the egalitarian cultural norm of the teaching profession and provoked conflict among teachers. Comments from teachers tapped by the principal participants in this study substantiate Donaldson et al.'s (2008) findings and highlight the barrier caused by the norms. One teacher reflected, "I was no longer one of them, a teacher. I was now viewed as a district person." Although lighthearted about it, another teacher noted that she received comments such as, "Oh, you're going over to the dark side." For some tapped teachers, colleagues would find passive ways to resist their leadership. When asking for information from teaching colleagues for a report he was preparing, one teacher noted, "Without saying no, they say no to my requests for further in-

formation. They say they don't have time, but realistically, they just don't want to do it, and they don't."

Discussion

This cross-case analysis explored the transformational leadership practices exhibited by three principals to build leadership capacity within their teacher leaders. Results suggested they did so by creating a culture based upon positive relationships, providing opportunities for authentic administrative work, and drawing on a personal ideology that motivates them to develop the next generation of principals. Furthermore, teachers found value in these relationships and perceived authentic administrative work opportunities as contributing to their leadership development. Lastly, several factors emerged as facilitating strategies used by principals to build capacity in tapped teachers, including commitments of time and site financial resources to provide leadership succession planning. In contrast, factors that inhibited leadership capacity building were psychological challenges such as additional stress and colleague resistance. In the section below, these findings are discussed in relation to their alignment to the study's theoretical framework, which consisted of three of Kouzes and Posner's (2008) exemplary practices: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, and enabling others to act.

Each of the principals modeled the way for tapped teachers by demonstrating the transformational leadership practices required to effectively lead a school. In addition, they developed positive, supportive relationships with the tapped teachers that allowed for powerful mentoring opportunities to arise as teachers worked on administrative duties. These mentoring relationships were the conduit through which teachers received feedback on their administrative practices. These findings are consistent with the recent literature on the benefits of mentoring (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). Principal tapping of teachers for school administration provided teachers with mentoring opportunities to develop into effective school administrators.

A second transformational practice, inspiring a shared vision, was demonstrated as principals built leadership capacity in tapped teachers. They encouraged the teachers in their quest for the principalship and worked alongside them, making it clear that they valued personal and professional growth and achievement. Despite differing motivational sources for this growth ideology, all three principals were successful in creating a vision for tapped teachers that inspired them to improve as educators. The ongoing opportunities for authentic practice in administration helped

tapped teachers develop a positive view of school administration and their own potential value as principals. Finally, principals' shared vision was further embraced as they enabled others to act by engaging the tapped teachers in collaborative, authentic administrative tasks. The three principals worked to build a culture and climate that supported tapped teachers in growing their skills, knowledge, and efficacy in school administration. The learning opportunities built upon teachers' strengths and provided occasion for detailed feedback and improvement in a range of duties that administrators undertake. Through the use of transformational leadership, this study was able to delineate the promising practices employed by the principal participants to foster and develop leadership capacity amongst their teachers.

Implications

Given the impact principals have on a school's success (Marzano et al., 2005), the findings from this study have implications for improving the educational field. The road to developing a reservoir of principal leaders who can increase academic achievement and empower teacher leadership can begin with this study to determine promising practices. As such, the findings have implications for several audiences including teachers, principals, and districts.

Transformational principal leaders can play a pivotal role in promoting teacher leadership. Principals can use these research-based practices to manage leadership complexities and foster growth among teachers. In turn, teachers can benefit from the principal employing practices such as developing a vision based on a personal purpose and creating a culture based on positive relationships. These practices may be implemented by creating a district-wide principal leadership academy. The leadership academy should be a collaborative effort focused on helping principals develop promising practices. During the academy, principals should examine their current practices, redesign their leadership strategies, and meet with principal mentors who have a history of success with leadership succession management plans.

Along with the development of a leadership academy, the findings also imply the need to help teachers overcome the stress of fulfilling a new role. This too may be addressed at the same academy. It would benefit teachers to have an empathetic principal leader who is aware of teachers' perceptions and the influence of their leadership practices. At the leadership academy, principals should learn how to develop teachers' competence and informally mentor teachers to help them persist through perceived leadership

challenges. Workshops should also focus on providing principals with ways to deliver constructive feedback that can help funnel teachers into administrative roles.

Future Research

This cross-case analysis illustrated how three principals worked to build leadership capacity within their tagged teachers to prepare them for the principalship. While thorough examination was conducted in this analysis, further questions beyond the scope of this study's research questions emerged. One recommendation for further research includes examining the obstacles female principals experience and how they overcome the proverbial glass ceiling. As Northouse (2013) noted, there are meaningful differences between women and men's leadership paths. Additionally, because the principals in this cross-case analysis were employed at suburban schools, a final recommendation for future studies includes a comparison of urban, rural, and suburban principals who tap teachers for school administration. This would serve to improve understanding of common and divergent succession planning practices across school settings.

Conclusion

This study's findings suggest that despite the evolution of the principal's role into a position with increasingly complex job responsibilities, principals can disrupt the traditional egalitarian school culture and empower teacher leadership. As such, the pursuit of effective principal succession management practices is achievable and can help ensure all schools have effective principals who can improve academic achievement and empower teachers' growth into leadership roles.

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Gender Bias Within the Superintendency: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT: Current research reveals a large percentage of teaching positions and administrative services credentials are held by women, although historically, men dominate the superintendent role. Specifically in the area of women in the superintendency, a discrepancy exists between men and women in recruitment practices, types of barriers and challenges, and the length of time one stays in the superintendent position. This study examines the superintendent role and the perceived leadership qualities necessary, barriers, challenges and opportunities, as well as the career pathway taken by those in the superintendent role. With a mixed-method design, the study reflects upon responses from six superintendents, three women and three men, using semi-structured interview questions and data collected with Bolman and Deal's (1990) Leadership Orientations (Self) Instrument and a demographics survey. A theoretical framework of management and leadership styles was utilized to analyze the data for themes relating to the three research questions. The findings generally indicated women superintendents perceive they are expected to act and behave differently to succeed in the role, while men are more at ease with making decisions and leading others. Gender biases were found to be prevalent for women, as the role of parenthood was the biggest barrier when considering their career pathway. This was not found to be a barrier for men.

Keywords: Professional learning, induction, inquiry, experiential learning, Common Core.

According to the American Association of School Administrators, in 2010, approximately 24.1% of American superintendents were female (Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2010). This number was a substantial improvement since the last time it was measured in 2000, when only 13.2% were women. Although women comprise the majority of classified staff and teachers in the P-12 education system (in 2011-2012, 76% of public school teachers were female as indicated by a 2011-2012 report by the U.S. Department of Education), males held just under 80% of the superintendent positions. A few recent studies on women superintendents (Derrington & Sharatt, 2009; Muñoz, Pankake, Murakami, & Simonsson, 2014; Sperandio & Devdas, 2014) describe the current issues female leaders are facing, which includes personal issues such as marriage, children, and relocation as well as professional challenges such as opportunity and gender bias. Obtaining the position of the superintendent is challenging enough without having to navigate external factors that women are currently subject to enduring. Women are often typecast as teachers or other personnel, making the pressure to exceed that first impression even greater (Muñoz et al., 2014).

Barriers

There are certain unwritten rules for women for obtaining a superintendent position. Tallerico (2000) explained, "These unwritten rules involve headhunters' and school board members' (a) defining quality in terms of hierarchies of particular job titles, (b) stereotyping by gender, (c) complacency about acting affirmatively, and (d) hypervaluing feelings of comfort and interpersonal chemistry with the successful candidate" (p. 37). Understanding the potential issues, both known and unknown, can help break down barriers to ensure that every candidate, female

or male, has an equitable opportunity to become a superintendent.

The underrepresentation of women in the superintendency and the possible reasons attributed with it requires additional research. Studies have shown that it is not the lack of training or experience necessary to succeed in the position that has led to the underrepresentation of female superintendents, but rather societal norms and beliefs regarding leadership, (Shakeshaft, 1989), school board expectations (Tallerico, 2000) and issues with the overall search and selection processes. Selection process issues include school boards not considering female candidates for positions, lack of mobility, and perceptions held by school board members that women are unqualified for the responsibilities of the position (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000).

One barrier women face as they move to the superintendency is the attitudes of gatekeepers. In this context, gatekeepers are defined as school board members who help to hire women superintendents and consultants working in superintendency searches who place women among the top candidates for superintendent positions (Chase & Bell, 1990). In a study by Chase and Bell (1990), the ideologies and discourse of individual achievement and gender neutrality were examined by exploring the explanations and descriptions of women's actions and situations as told by the gatekeepers. Little attention had been paid to gatekeepers' experiences and perspectives in relation to women in positions of power. The focus of studying gatekeepers' speech was on "how gatekeepers talk about women, that is, on the kinds of understandings about women's actions and situations that are produced by gatekeepers' speech" (Chase & Bell, 1990, p. 164). Research supports the fact that there are qualified women who enjoy the work and have the expertise to lead systems who are actively seeking the superintendency (Grogan & Brunner, 2005); however, the gatekeepers––school board members and search firms––are not hiring women at the same rate as men.

Another barrier involves headhunting, gender, and color. Tallerico (2000) explored the process of filling the position of superintendency from a gatekeeping and career mobility theory while looking specifically at gender and color. The idea of head hunting ties into the gatekeeping theory because headhunters may be able to personally control portions of the hiring process early on (i.e., the initial paper screening). They have the power to control who proceeds at various levels of the hiring process. There are three major categories in this area of inquiry. First, although there are guidelines on which a candidate is evaluated, they

are viewed differently based on the positions the candidate has previously held. This impacts women and people of color because these two groups are more likely to hold principalships at an elementary school than at the secondary levels (Tallerico, 2000). Cultural norms also play a role and prejudicial gender stereotyping does exist. Specifically females are often assumed to lack prior knowledge about particular issues related to the superintendency. Male candidates are expected to understand appropriate disciplinary actions, budgeting, and other non-instructional technical abilities, while the competencies of women are questioned. If a woman does make it as a finalist, the school board often questions whether they need to pay her as much as a male contender (Tallerico, 2000). The third category inquires about how a school board makes selection decisions. Many of the participants involved in the interviews described the chemistry or connection they feel with a candidate as crucial. Psychologically, humans are more likely to connect with others who are similar to them (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). This means that this 'fit' being assessed is more than likely to push women and people of color out of the position (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983).

Breaking Barriers and Challenging Life Styles

Derrington and Sharratt (2009) offered several suggestions for overcoming the continuous struggles female superintendents face. The strategies fall under four subcategories: resolve, balance, negotiate, and decide. To cultivate resolve, individuals need to be clear about professional and personal goals, stick to career goals and develop an action plan, and realize that sacrifice is necessary while determining limitations. In order to maintain balance, it is important for women to take care of their health, seek the advice of women who have created balance, and accept assignments that allow family participation. Women may also need to consider negotiating boundaries or ask for alternatives such as negotiating flexible time with their school board or compromising expectations with the board before making strong decisions.

Life choices. Sperandio and Devdas (2014) discussed the idea that women seeking superintendent positions must consider life factors their male counterparts may not face. Many women would not consider relocating or committing to a long commute in order to access a position that may further their career goals. In their study, 71 of the 109 respondents indicated they considered their spouse and their career or current position as either important or very important when deciding whether to take a superintendent position. The respondents continued to handle much of the domestic responsibility independently or with

very little help from their family or paid help. The findings indicate the responsibilities of a superintendent and lifestyle preferences of women who are qualified to take these positions are at odds, making it more difficult for women to obtain these positions. This in turn makes it more challenging to close the gender gap that exists in the position of superintendent and the gender balance in educational decisions that are made within school districts. The problem becomes more complex due to the realization that the responsibilities of the superintendent are unlikely to change, meaning women may continue to be faced with these challenging decisions between career and home life.

Although many studies have looked at leadership traits of superintendents, few have focused on gender biases that exist in this important leadership position. The current study used three research questions to address this this gap in the literature:

> 1) What are the leadership qualities that a superintendent needs to possess to have a successful tenure?

> 2) What strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are experienced in the role of superintendent?

> 3) What commonalities exist as it relates to the career pathway towards becoming a superintendent?

Methods

Participants

Six superintendents (n = 6), all from Southern California, participated in this study. Five participants were currently serving as superintendent and one was retired. Three participants were female and three were male. Participants ranged between 41 and 61 years of age, with a male being the youngest and a female being the oldest. Of the six participants, three reported being married (two females and one male), two reported being single (one female and one male), and one reported being divorced (male). All participants reported they had children, with no participant having more than three. The age of their children ranged from 22 months to 39 years old, with a male having the youngest child and a female having the oldest child. The participants served districts ranging from 2,600 to 18,000 students, with a male leading the smallest district and a female leading the largest district. Five superintendents represented elementary school districts (non-unified), while one represented a unified district that included high schools. All of the participants held doctoral degrees. Superintendent

tenure length ranged from five months to fourteen years, with females holding both the shortest and longest tenure.

Instrumentation

Bolman and Deal's (1990) Leadership Orientation (Self) Instrument (LOI), considered a valid and reliable instrument, was used as the main instrument of the study. Proposed in 1984, the Bolman and Deal leadership model has been widely accepted in organizational theory and applied to various organizations across an extensive time period. Bolman and Deal's (1990) model provides four specific frameworks: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. The four frameworks provide structure that leaders can employ to gain a better understanding of challenging situations. The authors believed reframing offers leaders "a chance to get beyond constricted, oversimplified views of leadership" and provides four distinct lenses through which each situation may be perceived (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 355).

According to Bolman and Deal (2013), the structural leader acts as the architect of the organization, focusing mainly on "task, facts, and logic, rather than personal limitation or liability" (p. 325). The human resource leader is a catalyst, acting as a facilitator in the organization to "advocate openness, caring, mutuality, listening, coaching, participation, and empowerment" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 360). The task of the political frame leader is to be an advocate who will "recognize major constituencies, develop ties to their leadership, and manage conflict as productively as possible" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 329). Lastly, the symbolic frame encourages leaders to act as a prophet with the task of inspiring workers. The authors propose several distinct features of today's leadership, noting that it is a multilateral, distributed activity that is contextual and situated in the exchange between the leader and constituents. But far from simplistic, many individuals fall into a combination of the frames. The structural and human resource frames are related to managerial effectiveness, while the political and symbolic frames are related to leadership effectiveness.

Permission to use the LOI was obtained from the author prior to starting the data collection process. Although the LOI has three sections, only the first section was used for analysis. This section consists of 32 Likert scale items that allows individuals to assess their own leadership skills. The results generate four scores for each participant––one for each of the four frames described above. A score of 32 or above or an average score above 4.0 indicates a preference for a frame. To obtain the frame frequency distribution,

each superintendent's scores for the frame were averaged. Lastly, the entire group's scores were averaged, and the statistical results were distributed across the four leadership frames.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and a survey using Bolman and Deal's (1990) LOI. Each participant received a phone call or an email and was invited to be interviewed. Upon agreement, individual in-person interviews were set up between the participant and at least two researchers to discuss the research questions presented in this study. Participants were also asked to complete a short demographic survey prior to the LOI. Each interview was recorded with the participant's permission. The researchers also took handwritten notes.

Qualitative data was manually transcribed to give the researchers an opportunity to become deeply familiar with the source material. Through a manual coding process, transcriptions were open, axial, and finally selective coded (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Emergent themes were identified and then grouped together and described in rich descriptive text.

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis is another tool used to analyze the results of our study. SWOT is one way to examine the environment around an issue or institution (Balamuralikrishna & Dugger, 1995). This strategic planning activity has been in practice since the 1950s (DeSilets, 2008) and allows organizations to explore their interconnections prior to making decisions or changes.

Results and Discussion

The findings from this study are separated into three sections, addressing each of the three research questions. Each section looks at the female responses, male responses, and finally a comparison of the female and male responses. The themes that emerged from the female interviews include communication, soft language, relationships, vision, and the implications of being a female superintendent. The theme that emerged from the male interviews was a unique approach to the position of superintendency. The female participants had multiple areas of overlap, using similar terms, language, and similar experiences. Conversely, each male participant had very unique responses that did not contain overlap similar to their female counterparts. As reported in the findings, the responses from each participant highlight these themes.

Research Question 1: What are the leadership qualities that a superintendent needs to possess to have a successful tenure?

Female Responses

The responses of the female participants to the first research question were analyzed and divided into four themes: *communication*, *relationships*, *vision*, and *overall female superintendent issues*.

Communication. Communication was discussed throughout all of the female interviews. The ability to communicate was examined in regards to organizational (i.e., the vision and mission, staff, faculty, etc.) and interpersonal needs. In addition, the other female superintendents discussed spending much of their day "just talking to people." Whether it was about a bad day or layoffs, they needed to hear people out and have the ability to facilitate two-way communication. This was an overarching theme evident throughout the female superintendent interviews.

In considering the topics of communication and leadership, Participant 1 stated, "You need the ability to communicate the vision and the mission of the organization, need the ability to articulate that vision." Participant 2 added, "You need to be caring, communicate extremely well, and need to be very good at multitasking. The communication is number one."

Participant 3 discussed the importance of communication with her school board. She was the predecessor to a male superintendent who held the position for 33 years. She described the prior superintendent as "legendary" and talked candidly about communicating with the board, her staff, and the community. She attributed much of her success in the district to open communication:

> It goes back to communication. I communicate everything with that board. And they are shocked; they've never had it before. They are well informed. There are no surprises . . . If there is something coming up, I tell my cabinet team [that] you need to write a transmittal. This is what we need to do. It is a whole cultural shift to bring to the district to ensure that people are communicating.

Soft language. Related to communication was the theme soft language. The female superintendents did not feel they could give a direct order or request. Instead they felt required to "front load" their board members and constituents. In order to effectively convey their message, word choice and tone needed to be considered and specifically selected for each audience. The female superintendents felt their communication

styles were effective, as they achieved success in their tenure as superintendents; however, this required extensive thought, effort, and understanding of what they were asking as leaders. They understood the dynamics they were entering and found effective ways to ensure the correct processes were being implemented.

Reflecting upon the topics of soft language and leadership, Participant 2 recalled the following when working with her male-dominated executive cabinet:

> I remember once, I said right in the beginning: 'You know, you might want to consider' or 'Have you ever thought about,' 'I would encourage you to.' And after I had done that, all of them said, oh my gosh, that's your way of telling us what to do. And I said, actually, you're right. And I laughed about that.

Participant 3 added, "How you project as a female to men to get your point across has to be orchestrated well, it has to be strategic." This participant provided an example: "I always told a story and I always told my team and my directors, 'Tell me ahead of time so I can front load them two to three weeks in advance.' And then I would tell them, 'I just want you to know that this is what was going on . . . this might be coming.' "

Relationships. Another evident theme was the need to build relationships. Each female described the importance of relationships with groups ranging from their day-to-day staff to outside colleagues they needed to call on for help. Relationships were at the core of the work each superintendent was doing and continued to be a vital part of the success of each female leader. This theme aligns with Bolman and Deal's (2013) Human Resources Framework. The relationships theme emerged through the interviews, even beyond the initial question of leadership qualities. The female participants spoke highly of their teams and how they benefitted from building close, working relationships. As one female mentioned, much of her day was spent talking to people. She described how this is still a hard concept for her to grasp because her prior job required paperwork and completing multiple reports, resulting in something tangible to show for each day. The superintendent described her understanding that while there was no need to produce a report, building relationships helped her do a better job. Each female superintendent felt her relationships were a vital part of their current or prior successes.

Participant 1 noted the following on the topics of relationships and leadership: "You also need strong interpersonal skills. This is really imperative. So much of my day is just talking to people." Participant 3 mentioned the importance of relationships in helping to build resources. Participant 2 confirmed this notion by adding, "The superintendent has to have a strong ability to build established relationships, rapport, confidence, and trust with the people she/he serves . . . It's all about building that relationship, that of trust."

Vision. The theme vision arose as an early indicator of what female superintendents felt was an important quality of being successful. Senge's (1990) *Fifth Discipline* discusses the importance of vision when leading an organization and being aware of how an individual vision may or may not support an organization. Each superintendent emphasized that it was not their personal ideals that were of most concern, but those of the students they were serving that should be most important. They each discussed their own visions helping to guide their decisions, especially those that were difficult to make. It is important to note that while their personal vision was not what drove their decisions, they chose organizations that aligned to those visions. They worked with organizations that had similar principles, values, and ideas so they were comfortable with the mission they were perpetuating. The idea of visionary leadership supports Bolman and Deal's (2013) Symbolic Framework. Each female interviewee was connected to their district without losing sight of doing work that was important to each of them.

In considering vision and leadership, Participants 2 and 3 remarked on the importance of being a visionary. Participant 2 highlighted the value of the superintendent being someone who "really understands the qualities of leadership" and can "inspire and motivate others to not only come on board but to share in the vision." She provided an example of this by stating,

> I am a firm believer in vision and mission and guiding principles in an organization . . . I would say things a thousand times and I would repeat things that would just affirm the values of the organization . . . When it came to making those tough decisions we could sit back and say okay, this was what we said we believed so it seems to me like the answer is really clear, but I am hearing from all of you that this is not what we believe so we need to change our actions because we can't say we believe this, but then do something different.

Participant 1 spoke of the daunting task of establishing a shared mission and vision: "It was about 30 people in total and we worked to create the vision and

mission for the entire district. We spent so much time on identifying the right words or phrases to use."

Issues. The female participants expressed areas that were issues specifically related to being a female superintendent. Their experiences corresponded to those experiences documented in the literature review. Their direct quotes demonstrate the issues, perceived or real, that women in leadership positions face. Along with the challenges of the job, female superintendents are tasked with possessing a strong sense of self and the ability to depersonalize some of their experiences. One female participant shared her experience of being evaluated on her professional dress––an area her male predecessors had never been evaluated on. These responses imply that female superintendents require skills to know what it means to be a female superintendent

Participant 2, who was the first female superintendent of her district (16 years prior), talked about the challenges of her experience. When attending conferences, she described being directed to the teacher gathering area and garnering surprised reactions from attendees when she declared her superintendent position. She often felt like she had to prove herself and her strength, as she described a scenario in which she was asked by a female board member to be "more of a boss." Participant 2 went on to ask the board member for clarification by stating, "So what I'm really hearing from you is that you want me to slam my fist down once in a while and yell at someone periodically, and she said, 'Yea, be more of a boss . . . ' That's just one example of what I had. I have stories, and stories like that, that were interesting, that I knew if I were a male, I wouldn't be dealing with."

Participant 1 spoke of the challenges of being a female superintendent and the societal expectation regarding familial obligation that are traditionally placed on women. When considering the acceptance of the superintendent position, Participant 1 recalled a conversation she had with her former boss:

> When I was looking at moving into the superintendent position, my former boss told me I didn't want to work in a district with a high school. My youngest is seven years old. He said I would be away at events every night, and he is still so young. I knew I wasn't willing to give up that time with him. He is still so young so that impacted my decision in terms of moving into this role.

Participant 3 spoke of the importance of self-talk in monitoring personal moods and emotions during interpersonal relationships within the workplace:

> One of the first things I believe in and tell my staff is that as a leader, you don't have a right to wake up in the morning in a bad mood. You can be in a bad mood, but you go do it somewhere else, cannot show your team that. There are days, trust me that I am down. But I don't allow myself to be projected out. I catch myself, so I constantly self-talk myself. Put myself in check. I started this as an assistant superintendent. Especially for women, you have to self-talk, all the time; it never goes away. You have to put yourself in check all the time.

Male Responses

Male participants did not display any overlapping themes for leadership qualities needed for the superintendent position. However, the male responses did provide insight into their unique perspectives on the necessary skills required to be a successful superintendent. The participants' distinctive responses demonstrate how each male had a unique approach to successful leadership.

The participants' responses aligned with Bolman and Deal's (2013) Structural Framework. In general, the male participants were action-oriented and focused on the organization as a whole. They presented skills that were fairly concrete and tangible. Participant 6 explained that leader success requires having a concrete purpose and commitment. Alternatively, Participant 5 focused on the importance of being able to make a decision, as he described the need to "take some action to make those things happen over time," but also being flexible when things do not work out.

Participant 4 stressed the importance of knowing yourself:

> So the first thing I think of is kind of know thyself. So you know you never completely know yourself. But I think knowing what attributes and characteristics you have and how those things might relate to the structural generic position of superintendent is important, but you don't know that until you actually do the job. . . . So really developing understanding of yourself and understanding of the organization.

Additionally, Participant 4 spoke of the importance of stability of leadership for the success of an organization, noting a strong correlation between the duration of the position held and "educational performance in particular towards transformational change." As demonstrated, each participant's responses were ex-

clusive to his perspective for the position of superintendent.

Comparison of Responses

In reviewing the themes that emerged from the interviews, the responses differed from female to male. The first difference is in the topics discussed. The females' comments did have reoccurring themes, while the males' comments did not. While this is a surprising finding, the data indicate that the males have a broad number of topics to discuss and therefore the data did not overlap. Many of the qualities the females participants discussed were interpersonal in nature and people-centered, which aligns with Bolman and Deal's (2013) Human Resource Framework. While each female superintendent had her own approach to leadership, each perceived the necessary qualities to be a leader similarly. In contrast, the males interviewed had little to no overlap in their perception of qualities needed to be successful as a superintendent. While there was some discussion of personal qualities by the male participants, many of the qualities were related to the organization and overall success. The difference in responses clearly demonstrates the distinction in perceived leadership qualities between males and females. All six interviewees either held or were currently holding the same position, in a relatively small radius of geographic location, and yet presented very different qualities needed for superintendent success.

Leadership Qualities as Assessed Through Bolman and Deal

Bolman and Deal's (1990) LOI provided additional information about participants' leadership qualities. Based on the results, many superintendents in this study utilized a multi-frame approach. The participants' means were highest for the Human Resources Framework, followed by the Symbolic Framework. The Structural and Political Frames were low scoring, which indicates that they are not as heavily utilized as the other two frames.

Research Question 2: What strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are experienced in the role of superintendent?

The analysis of an organization is a crucial step in the discovery process. SWOT analysis is one tool that has been a simple yet effective framework, allowing organizational features to quickly be defined as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. For the purpose of this case study, a SWOT analysis was utilized to review the responses of those interviewed to discover common emergent themes. This was done to provide deeper insight into understanding the var-

ying perspectives that males and females feel in their role as superintendent.

Female Responses

Findings from the SWOT analysis uncovered common themes within the female participants (Figure 1). These themes were identified as *communication*, *relationships*, *vision*, and *gender issues*. Several internal strengths emerged while reviewing the participants' responses through the SWOT. *Communication*, *relationships*, and *vision* were identified as strengths and opportunities for female superintendents. Communicating the needs of the organization, being in cohesion with the board of trustees, and communicating a culture of care were highlighted as strengths. However, communicating the differing opinions of individuals and overturning established practices were both defined as weaknesses.

Participants noted the importance of building relationships inside and outside the organization. Relationships were identified as trusting others, finding balance, and celebrating others' successes. However, the relationship with the board of trustees was also perceived as a potential threat and opportunity. One superintendent pointed out, "When you're able to highlight your board of trustees and establish trust within your relationship, you're able to be more impactful within the organization."

The development and establishment of a cohesive vision within the organization of the district was noted as a strength and opportunity. One superintendent stated she was a firm believer in vision, mission, and guiding principles within an organization. She also remarked it would be challenging to lead a district if the norms and values of the organization were not clearly articulated.

Gender issues and feelings of inequality were discussed through the interview process. Some female participants perceived gender issues as a weakness. One example of a defined weakness was clearly shown when Participant 2 stated that throughout her career as a superintendent, she felt she had to work harder, show up more, be stronger, and look happier. When partaking in her formal evaluation, a question was posed about how she dressed. Upon reviewing past male superintendents' evaluation questions, dress attire was not an area of review for her male counterparts. Another barrier that a participant felt was when a mentor encouraged her to not be superintendent of a high school district. His rationale for the advice was that he felt running a high school district, and the late night obligations associated with the posi-

tion, was not feasible for a mother with young children.

Male Responses

Similar themes were uncovered for the male participants within the findings from the SWOT analysis (Figure 2). These themes were identified as *communication*, *relationships*, and *vision*. Gender issues and feelings of inequality were not a defined theme from male participants. The importance of communication for the superintendency was defined as a strength, as was making decisions and embracing the responsibility of the position. A weakness, which was noted by more than one participant, was the challenge in changing others' perspectives. Raising the expectations of individuals was also stated as a weakness from more than one participant. In both instances, superintendents described the difficulty in reforming practices that have always been in place, which had not been challenged or changed throughout the years. Encouraging and requiring these changes were viewed as challeng-

es, which we defined as weaknesses within the organization.

Establishing and maintaining relationships within the organization were defined as both a strength and opportunity. One superintendent remarked when you "treat everyone from a board member to a food service worker with the same level of respect, I think that transforms a district and sets the tone that everyone has a seat at the table and everyone's voice will be heard." Another participant stated the importance of being "hard on the issues but soft on people." This resonated a common sentiment of the participants of the importance of building solid relationships within the organization.

The challenge of creating a shared vision within the organization was a perceived weakness to several participants. One superintendent stated he felt people's expectations could be barriers to the organization. Conversely, some superintendents viewed individuals who challenge the system or vision as an opportunity for growth within the organization. They also viewed

INTERNAL	**STRENGTHS** • Leading a team to best serve children • Build culture of care • Establish uniform vision, mission and guiding principles • Implications for decisions that are made that affect the organization as a whole • Communicate the needs of the organization • Building relationships* • Trusting others • Finding balance • Celebrating others successes • Make your barriers your opportunities *reported by more than one interviewee	**WEAKNESSES** • Differing opinions • Overturning decisions • Perceived need to do more than male counterparts • Gender inequality from board and community members
EXTERNAL	**OPPORTUNITIES** • Impacting 18,000 students each year • Highlight your board of trustees	**THREATS** • Limited resources* • Maintaining cultural practices • Inherited Issues • Very large Organization • Board of trustees* • Legal and financial constraints • Changing legislation • No boss-no one higher up to go to *reported by more than one interviewee

Figure 1. Female superintendent SWOT analysis chart.

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
INTERNAL	• Conversations with others • Making decisions • Embracing the responsibility • Treating others equitably* • Allowing others to challenge *reported by more than one interviewee	• Teachers ability or not do deal with the whole child • Having meaningful connections with students • Putting in the effort needed • Trusting others on your team • Raising expectations* • Changing others perspectives* • Peoples relationship to their activities *reported by more than one interviewee
	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
EXTERNAL	• Supportive board that is in agreement	• Poverty • Students aren't self-actualized • Students trauma and mental illness • Indigenous groups, migrant workers • Large amount of foster youth • Never-ending list of things to do • Retiring administrators, breaking up the cohesive team • Structural issues-not enough time • Time management and prioritization

Figure 2. Male superintendent SWOT analysis chart.

those hard-handed decisions and the responsibility that is accompanied with the job as an opportunity.

The male participants were able to define more threats and weaknesses than strengths and opportunities as compared to the female participants. The female participants noted more strengths and opportunities above all others. Additionally, male participants did not recognize gender issues. Communication and relationship building were both identified as areas of strength by both groups of participants. Both groups noted there are opportunities available given their ongoing interactions with the boards of trustees. Both groups also agreed that working with differing opinions, raising expectations, and changing decisions and perspectives were a defined weakness within their organizations. Lastly, the cultural practices of the district and how to approach what has been maintained within the organization were noted as threats.

One obvious theme missing from the male participants as compared to females was the feeling of inequality and gender issues. None of the male participants recognized any threats or weaknesses of being a male superintendent, whereas several of the female participants noted feelings of inequality being a female and the challenges accompanied with serving as

superintendent. Although the number of females within the role of superintendent has steadily increased over the past few decades, there continues to be obvious challenges that females face that their male counterparts do not.

Research Question 3: What commonalities exist as it relates to the career pathway towards becoming a superintendent ?

The last area considered in this case study was that of the career pathway of each person interviewed as they worked towards becoming a superintendent. Unlike the responses to previous research questions, the interviewees did not elaborate on their career pathways, thus their responses were concise.

Female Responses

Prior to taking on the role of the superintendent, all three female participants held the positions of teacher, assistant principal, and principal. The female participants all pursued education and did not consider other careers choices.

All three females spoke of the importance of holding different positions leading up to the superintendency. All participants explained that their experiences

in the different positions helped better prepare them for the challenges that they face in the role of superintendent. The amount of time spent in each position was not as important as how effective they were as a leader in those positions. Additionally, the knowledge they were able to gain while serving in prior roles allowed them to be more effective in the educational leadership position.

Male Responses

Similar to the female participants, all three males held the positions of teacher, assistant principal, and principal. While none changed careers mid-life, two of the three did speak of how education was not their original field of study in college. However these two participants expressed their need and desire to make a difference in children's lives as a factor in their ultimate decision to pursue a career in education.

There were no common themes that emerged in the male responses to career pathways when they elaborated on this particular question. One spoke of the need to become more assertive in the leadership role. He spoke about having tough conversations with people and how this was a weakness of his, so to help improve this skill, he sought out a position in human resources to build on this area. He stated he used to be a "fixer," but using his experience in the variety of positions held helped him to understand that it is his job to challenge the barriers of his team. Another spoke about the superintendency as the opportunity for personal growth and the ability to do a million jobs in one. He also said the superintendency provides great opportunity for "scaling," which he described as going from micro-granular to the big picture and back. He sees his role in the bigger picture as making the world a better place. Another spoke of the influence of his father being a migrant farm worker, which caused his family to move around a lot as a child. This personal experience led to a better understanding and appreciation for the struggles and challenges that children of farm workers face each day. He noted that as a superintendent, "you have an opportunity each day to make a difference".

Combined Female and Male Responses and Emergent Themes

While discussing their career pathways, all six participants described an obvious passion for the work they do and displayed a strong commitment to improving school environments and fostering student learning. All six highlighted similar themes of *the importance of knowing thyself*, *having a defined mission and vision that is developed and shared with the stakeholders*,

and *answering the call to serving and making a difference in the lives of children*.

Limitations

For the findings of this study to be properly understood, they should be considered in the context of their limitations. The researchers were required to complete the study within a limited timeframe, thus resulting in a relatively small sample size of male and female participants. A larger sample size may have provided a more in-depth analysis highlighting additional themes for exploration. Second, because this study relied on self-reported data, it may have been influenced by poor understanding and could be vulnerable to intentional deception that comes from the desire to conform to social expectations. Although our participants seemed to speak candidly in response to the research questions, some may not have felt safe to be forthcoming, resulting in guarded responses.

Implications and Future Research

Issues of gender bias are ever present. When compared to men, women are still perceived as being inferior in both strength and intelligence. Many still fear that women will make decisions based on emotion rather than facts. This is an area that would be worth exploring by further interviewing and surveying multiple stakeholders regarding their perspectives on women in positions of power and their abilities to effectively lead an organization. An additional area for future research is the decision-making process behind a woman's choice of pursuing a high-power educational leadership position such as superintendent. With more men choosing to adopt the role of the stay-at-home parent or follow the non-traditional path and support and accept the woman as the top salary earner, women may begin to feel more inclined to pursue a superintendent position without feeling any sense of guilt in doing so. Lastly, additional areas of research may include expanding the study sample size, comparing urban versus rural school district superintendents, and comparing challenges of women and men seeking administrative roles in higher education. Continued research on this topic will add to the growing knowledge base of female leaders.

Conclusion

The findings from this case study indicate there were no common themes within male and female respondents. Female superintendents gave similar responses to each other and themes of communication, relationships, vision, and ideas of gender bias emerged. The women interviewed described their perceived struggles with being a female in the super-

intendent role. Each male superintendent gave unique responses, but no common themes emerged. Using a SWOT analysis, female participants highlighted more strengths and opportunities of the superintendency than males, while male participants noted more threats and weaknesses. Female participants noted that being a female carried a unique set of challenges, and along with feelings of inequality, acted as a barrier to their leadership position. Male participants did not mention any gender-related concerns.

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Creating Meaningful Grades

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Grades matter, and the future lives of students are in many ways dependent on teacher grading practices. After all, so many decisions that affect students' lives, including student ranking, matriculation, retention, college admission, and scholarships, depend on grades (Guskey, 2015; Marzano, 2000). This is troubling because the grading practices used in high schools across the country are generally considered to be highly variable and invalid measures of learning, often consisting of a hodgepodge of factors including achievement, behavior, and effort (Brimi, 2011; Brookhart, 1991; Randall & Engelhard, 2009, 2010). In other words, the data that many parties use to make important decisions regarding the lives of students is invalid. In fact, Marzano (2000), a leading grading researcher, declared, "Grades are so imprecise that they are almost meaningless" (p. 1). While most parties assume that grades represent student learning (Brookhart, 2004), this is rarely the case. As a result, the misinterpretation of grade data often leads to poor decisions regarding students. To add insult to injury, over 100 years of research has documented these problems (Brookhart et al., 2016), but educators' seeming indifference to the research has resulted in no significant changes (Dueck, 2014; Reeves, 2011).

Doubtlessly some school leaders seek to make positive changes in this area, but they face many challenges to their efforts. Grading is an extremely controversial topic, as teachers traditionally enjoy full autonomy of the practice. As a result, some teachers may feel that any grading reform infringes on a sacred teaching right passed down from Horace Mann himself. Moreover, grading is not a topic that most teachers, students, and parents even see as a problem area. The hodgepodge practices referred to in the literature are all that teachers and parents often know. It is what they experienced as students and it is what they have come to expect in schools teaching their own children. In fact, for many, traditional grading practices are part of what makes school *school* (Kunnath, 2016; Marzano, 2000). Any reform movement is risky, but attempts to reform practices that are seen in most

schools as acceptable, if not ideal, can be especially difficult.

Clearly grading reform is a complex topic, and upon some consideration of both sides of the issue, it seems that a measured approach to reform is most likely to produce desired results. The educator choosing this approach realizes that grading reform is in the best interest of student learning, but that it must also be done tactfully. The reformer seeks to improve the very foundation of grading practices, but she also wants to limit dissension within the school community. For all of these reasons, an opportune beginning to grading reform is the establishment of meaningful grades. By clearly establishing the meaning of student grades, an individual teacher or an entire school can take a big step toward improving the integrity of report card grades and the grading practices that lead up to them.

Why Grades Require an Explicit Meaning

Without a definitive meaning, grades are nearly worthless. Letter grades have no universal meaning, so for anyone to accurately interpret the feedback that grades are intended to provide, they require teacher-defined meanings. Whether used as scores on assessments or as a summary of a marking period on a report card, grades require a definition that enables the intended audience—primarily students and parents––to clearly understand students' performance in each class. And while it is standard knowledge that an A on a report card represents excellence, one must wonder: What about the student is excellent? *Is it achievement? Attendance? Participation? Effort? Behavior? A combination of all of these factors*? By establishing a grade meaning, teachers take the guesswork out of grades and add transparency to their practices.

Focusing on grade meaning can also provide teachers with a new lens to view their grading practices, helping them to be more intentional about how they create report card grades. This new way of thinking can then lead to further grading reform efforts such as improving grade accuracy, establishing common

grading practices, and revising report cards. In this manner, defining grade meaning can be seen as a high-leverage reform. Like any reform, establishing grading meaning is best accomplished when it is aligned to relevant research.

Creating a Research-aligned Grade Meaning

According to measurement experts, grades should mean one thing: student learning of academic standards (Guskey, 2015; Reeves, 2011). This is, after all, what teachers are best qualified and able to measure. Teachers following this recommendation should create a meaning statement that ensures clarity and transparency of grades. Next, this meaning needs to be communicated to students and parents (Guskey, 2015; Reeves, 2011)––a process that is about actively educating them. The communication process is also about changing grading culture from grades as classroom currency for punishing and rewarding students to grades as data on student learning. The more students and parents buy into this new culture, the more the teacher can focus students' energy on their own learning instead of misguided attention to grade grubbing.

The Grade Meaning Statement

The grade meaning statement should be concise and straightforward to achieve the purpose of communicating grade meaning to students and parents (Guskey, 2015). Figure 1 displays an example statement appearing on a syllabus in a high school English class. Although the example is simple, it communicates the message that grades equal student learning, and it allows students and parents to understand the basic meaning without further interpretation. Once developed, the teacher's grade meaning statement

should be communicated multiple times to students and parents throughout each school year. This begins at the start of the year when teachers explain the grade meaning to their students and provide them with a syllabus that includes the grade meaning statement. But in addition to reciting the statement, it is important for teachers to provide students with the rationale for this grade meaning. Students need to understand why grades require a change from traditional practices. In order to shift grading culture, students need to comprehend that grades are often misused for purposes other than communicating student learning. Teachers should then continue to remind students about the meaning of grades in the class at least once per quarter and provide an opportunity for class discussion on the topic. It is also important to communicate the meaning to parents—ideally in person—at least once per school year. This opportunity may arise in parent-teacher conferences, back-to-school night, or even in individual phone calls home. Face-to-face communication allows parents to better understand the meaning of the grade and have an opportunity to discuss any questions or concerns they may have. These conversations about grades with students and parents are key factors in transforming grading culture.

Aligning Theory to Practice

Beyond creating and communicating the grade meaning statement, meaningful grade creation requires teachers to apply grading theory to practice. To do so, teachers should ensure that all grades represent only student learning of the curriculum at the end of a learning unit. This requires a reflection process in which teachers consider the purpose of each of their

Meaning of Grades: Grades appearing on assessments and report cards represent the student's learning of specific academic standards in the class. See the back of the page for the pacing of standards throughout each quarter.

Figure 1. Example grade meaning statement appearing on a syllabus aligned to researcher recommendations.

assessments and assignments to ensure alignment to the established grade meaning. Through reflection, teachers ensure purposeful assessments and assignments that result in more valid student grades.

The grade reflection process may best begin with assessment review. Assessments that are used to measure student learning progress, often termed *formative assessments* or quizzes, should not receive grades because they are used in the middle of the learning process. They are meant to determine what additional

learning, if any, a student requires for a particular standard, so assigning a grade representing summative learning would be unfair and inaccurate. Instead of grades on formative assessments, teachers should provide detailed feedback, rubric scores, or other marks that are not recorded in the gradebook. The other form of assessment, used to measure student learning at the end of a unit and often termed *summative assessment*, should receive grades. In fact, summative *assessments* should be the only instruments that

teachers use to measure summative learning and therefore the only thing in a class receiving a grade. This reliance on summative assessments to create report card grades also means that teachers must do their best to ensure these assessments accurately assess student learning of the standards explicitly taught in class. While this does not require teachers to be psychometricians, it does require them to be purposeful in assessment creation.

Grade reflection is also useful to ensure purposeful assignments. Throughout a long school year, student assignments, in the form of classwork and homework, are especially prone to lack a meaningful purpose. Whether misused at times as "busy work" or to instill rigor in students through daily homework, assignments often stray from a optimal purpose of practicing academic standards and fostering learning that will later be assessed on summative assessments. Those assignments not aligned to this purpose should be revised or eliminated. As this assignment purpose is much different from the assessment purpose of measuring learning, assignments should not receive a grade. Because practice is used during the learning process, it would not be fair or accurate to assign students a grade that represents their learning on a standard when they are still in the middle of the learning process.

After ensuring assessment and assignment alignment to the grade meaning statement, the report card grade becomes clearer and simpler to create and interpret. Because the research-aligned grade represents only student learning of academic standards explicitly taught in the class, the final report card grade can only be composed of summative assessment grades. As the typical grading quarter lasts between eight and twelve weeks and a learning unit typically lasts a minimum of two weeks, it is likely that a report card grade representing an academic quarter would contain four to five assessments and hence four to five total grades. While recommending a particular method of combining these four to five assessment grades to create a report card grade is beyond the scope of this article, the teacher should be mindful that the final grade is truly representative of the student's learning of academic standards explicitly taught during the marking period.

Anticipating Teacher Objections

For the school leader looking to build support for reform across an entire department, school, or district, it is important to consider potential teacher objections ––especially with an issue as contentious as grading. One potential objection is the need to define grade

meaning all together. To educators with the understanding that grades have a universal meaning requiring no additional explanation, taking the time to explicitly define grade meaning may seem unnecessary. Although misguided, this concern does have some merit. It is true that the public's general understanding of report card grades is that they represent student learning (Brookhart, 2004). Unfortunately this general understanding is usually inaccurate, as the hodgepodge nature of grades often results in an unclear meaning consisting of both achievement and non-achievement factors (Randall & Engelhard, 2009, 2010). But grading without a clearly established meaning is clearly poor practice. Further, decision makers who use teacher-created grades that lack an explicit meaning and are created in a hodgepodge manner are destined to make ill-informed decisions pertaining to student learning.

A second major objection will undoubtedly arise as some teachers question why students will complete assignments if they are not graded. Teachers with this concern believe students primarily complete assignments, quizzes, and tests because of the grades they receive, and without these grades, students have little to no motivation to complete any work. This type of concern represents a traditional and antiquated grading paradigm in which grades serve as a classroom currency and students are rewarded and punished for certain types of classroom behaviors (Guskey, 2015; Marzano, 2000). The necessary paradigm shift required to transform grading culture will take time, continued reflection, and dialogue within the school community to take hold and become internalized. But teachers with this objection need to understand that by grading assignments, the teacher often conflates effort and/or behavior with learning. Upon converting to a grade exclusively representing student learning and ensuring the purposeful alignment of assignments and assessments, teachers are often surprised to find that students continue to complete their work and take quizzes even without grades. In fact, upon shifting the grading culture to one centered on meaningful grades, each assignment and quiz can become more meaningful for students to truly practice their learning, gauge the breadth and depth of their learning of the standards, and prepare for the summative assessment––largely leaving the need to copy, cheat, and grade grub in the grading past.

Conclusion

Student grades that appear on assessments and report cards have no universal meaning and therefore require teachers to explicitly define and communicate the meaning in a clear manner to students and par-

ents. Grading experts recommend the meaning to be student learning of academic standards, which requires teachers following this recommendation to create report card grades consisting only of summative assessment grades. In addition, grades strictly representing student learning require assessments and assignments that reflect and reinforce this meaning. However, establishing a sound grade meaning is not the end of the grading reform process––it is just the beginning. But this work does put educators on the path of grading reform, and their grading practices will be stronger as a result. Further, by doing so reformers begin the important, yet challenging process of transforming grading culture. With over 100 years of poor grading practices in our country, even the most zealous reformer cannot enact grading reform over night. But a focus on clearly establishing grade meaning can be the catalyst for this long-awaited reform that students so desperately deserve.

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